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MISCELLANIES



STORIES AND ESSAYS

VOL. I



Yours very truly
John H. Whigshhead

MISCELLANIES

STORIES AND ESSAYS

BY

JOHN HOLLINGSHEAD

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I

LONDON:

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1874.

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JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.

PREFACE.

These STORIES and ESSAYS have met with the approval of Editors like the late CHARLES DICKENS, W. M. THACKERAY, DR NORMAN MACLEOD, &c. Some of them have been dedicated, by permission, to the RIGHT HON. JOHN BRIGHT, M.P. The public have accepted them in a variety of Magazine and Book forms, and MESSRS TINSLEY BROTHERS are willing to risk publishing another and uniform edition.

JOHN HOLLINGSHEAD.

*Garrick Club,
London, October, 1873.*

PLATE X

These figures are arranged in a series of four groups, each group containing four figures. The figures are arranged in a grid, with four figures in each row and four figures in each column. The figures are arranged in a grid, with four figures in each row and four figures in each column. The figures are arranged in a grid, with four figures in each row and four figures in each column.

JOHN BELL

1850

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THE HUMILIATION OF FOGMOOR.

CHAPTER I.

IF old Mr Snarlington had occasion, at any time, to put his hand upon four or five hundred thousand pounds, he knew exactly where to find it, either in money or in money's worth. He had odd notions respecting honesty, character, principle, public virtue, looking upon such things as vague generalities, and empty words. I believe that he never wrote a letter, nor willingly caused one to be written to him. He liked people to visit him upon business matters, as he always visited them when any necessity arose for negotiation. He disliked books, pamphlets, newspapers, and print of all kinds; and, as to theories, the very mention of them made him rabid. He firmly held and vigorously acted upon his conviction, that one good, solid experiment was worth all the reams of type that were ever sent forth with a view of enlightening the country. He had an unbounded faith in the power of money; and, as this opinion was drawn from forty years' observation, and the command of enormous wealth, it may have been correct, as it was certainly very pardonable.

He had no relations, except a niece, who acted as his housekeeper, and he was therefore fully entitled, even in the eyes of society, to spend his money in any way he thought proper.

Old Mr Snarlington was benevolent; but his benevolence—like everything he did—took a peculiar, practical, and singular form. 'Catch me, sir,' he used to say, 'founding schools, to be diverted from their original objects ten years after I am dead; to be sucked dry by

a gang of leech-like wardens, sub-wardens, vergers, deans, and chapters. Catch me founding schools to keep money in the pockets of the upper, middle, and lower upper classes, which ought to be expended in the education of their children. Catch me, sir, subscribing to a batch of flaunting societies to have sixty per centum of my subscriptions eaten away by a pack of hungry secretaries, collectors, and hangers-on: to see them devouring the corn, and presenting the dry, hollow husks to the lips of the sick mother and the helpless child. No, sir; if any widows, cripples, and orphans want anything that I can give them, let them come to me, or I will go to them direct, sir,—direct as a line; and by —— (I am sorry to say that Mr Snarlington frequently wound up one of these orations with an oath) they shall not be sent empty away.'

If it be necessary to describe the personal appearance and habits of Mr Snarlington, I may say that he was tall and wiry. He was about sixty years of age, with gray hair and twinkling brown eyes, always neatly dressed, always active in his movements, and very impressive in his discourse.

He had bought land—not to a great extent—in the immediate neighbourhood of Fogmoor, Hants, and had settled down as an inhabitant of that important town and borough. Mr Snarlington lived a very quiet and retired life; his dwelling and establishment were far from being grand and ostentatious, and no one in Fogmoor—not even the local gentry—had the slightest idea of the vast wealth which he commanded. He made no acquaintances in the county, and he had few friends. His habits and peculiarities rendered him averse to what is commonly called society, and congenial companions were rare to be met with. Therefore Mr Snarlington lived the life of a commonplace, respectable, unobtrusive, private gentleman.

Not so the great man of the borough, and the member who represented it in Parliament, whose name was Sir Tomahawk Sternhold. Baronet he was not, at present, but baronet he, one day, hoped to be, and that before long; also Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home Secretary, Colonial Secretary, Foreign Secretary, First Lord of the Admiralty, Prime Minister, Baron and Peer; for all which various and widely different offices and positions he had fully qualified himself according to the custom of parliamentary gentlemen of an ambitious nature.

Simple knight, as he was, it was not by any means known in the country how, when, or why Sir Tomahawk Sternhold became possessed of his title. Malicious report said he was once a kind of

gentleman-footman in attendance upon majesty. Be this as it may, he was certainly now a knight, and his lips having once tasted of dignity, only thirsted for more. He was well seconded by his lady, who had formerly been one of the palace housekeepers. Many a footman and lady's-maid had been discharged from the Sternhold service for failing to say, my lady or your ladyship. Even Sir Tomahawk himself, although he knew it was incorrect, was not averse to hearing himself called your lordship by the ignorant, but respectful peasantry.

Sir Tomahawk was a most important man in Fogmoor, as any one could see, who watched his progress through the town at any time, in the open landau, with my lady. It was an ovation—that is the term. Not that Sir Tomahawk was really liked or respected. He was far from being affable, and was known (especially by his tradesmen) not to be rich; and Fogmoor people were not in the habit of giving their homage or their affection to those who were not well able to pay for it. The secret of Sir Tomahawk's popularity lay in another direction.

It had been spread about the town that Sir Tomahawk could do anything he liked with the ministry of the day. He had got the ear of the court. Prime Ministers of different and almost undistinguishable shades of opinion, might flourish or might fade, as they had flourished and had faded pretty frequently during the last three years; but the court influence of Sir Tomahawk remained unshaken as a lighthouse. Had he not been a useful, a favourite, and a confidential, though seemingly unimportant, member of the household? Lady Tomahawk, too; all the years that she had been behind the scenes you may be sure had not been thrown away. She knew exactly where to find the hidden springs of patronage, as well as her illustrious husband. If any man, whether of Fogmoor, or from any part of England, could once interest Sir Tomahawk in his favour, he need not trouble himself much more with hard work; for he was on the high road to a government appointment.

Although these opinions savoured of Sternhold Grange, they were implicitly believed in, and passed current, instead of coin, to a great extent, in Fogmoor. Tradesmen who wanted money, and had long accounts against Sternhold Grange, instead of sending in their claims, paraded their grown-up male families, and talked about the Excise or the Customs. Lawyers or bankers who had advanced cash upon securities beyond the margin of their value were not harsh or importunate; for they were pacified with a vision of certain vacant places

in one of the fruitful governmental hives of—salary. Men who had sold their political birthright as everything else was sold in Fogmoor, upon credit and a promise to pay, were hopeful yet of receiving their payment in some shape from the national purse. There was little shame upon these subjects; although the great Reform Bill was a fact in the land.

Straitened as Sir Tomahawk's circumstances undoubtedly were for the want of ready money, he had not neglected certain duties, that do not cost much, and go a great way in a country town. Sir Tomahawk's election had been carried in the interest of the ministry of the hour—a divine right of expediency ministry—to which Sir Tomahawk, for the moment, was attached. He always was attached to the party in power. A safe, valuable, and reliable man was Sir Tomahawk; a man who could be spoken to; who could be trusted, who could be used; and who never gave a whipper-in a sleepless night or a second's uneasiness. Ah! if the country had more men like Sir Tomahawk Sternhold, how smoothly and delightfully the springs of government would move.

Sir Tomahawk being a man of tact, and a man of self-reliance, acted as his own election-agent; and no man, not even the renowned firm of Alabaster and Ermine, could have managed the business better. He knew his borough, and bought it at a contract-price, money-down, paid by the standing political committee of the Wool-sack Club; and, with characteristic prudence and economy, he made a good profit by each transaction. Having cashed the handsome ministerial cheque, he looked round the town of Fogmoor, to see in what direction he could make the best investment of the smallest part of it, to reap, in return, the most plentiful crop of political capital. After consultation with my lady, he came to the conclusion that a new organ for the church, a new pump for the market-place, and the painting and whitewashing of the charity school-rooms, were things that could no longer be done without. The pump was ordered and erected, the organ was built and opened, and the school-room was made bright and unbearable for the children, for many weeks to come. Nor did the exertions of the worthy Sir Tomahawk end here. He gave a grand entertainment to the workhouse poor in and around Fogmoor; a rather numerous body of melancholy units in the great crowd of local over-population. A curious entertainment it was; at which no one was happy and comfortable, because no one was in earnest; and which all alike, both guests and entertainers, were glad to see the end of.

It was the only thing like a mistake that Sir Tomahawk was guilty of; for it was evidently not in his way, and he was wise enough never to try it again. The long, shambling procession of the juvenile paupers through the town was one of the most melancholy spectacles that Fogmoor had seen for many a day. The children themselves, though young and ignorant, seemed to feel that they were only being walked out for a purpose. Some feared they were marching to a punishment merited by the crimes and poverty of their parents, and clung to each other for mutual protection. The genius of the arrangers of the festival had been exerted to put the right boy or girl in the wrong place. Friendships and sympathies spring up even in workhouses; but they were not to be allowed to extend their manifestations into the rank and file of a school procession. Those children were classed together who were of an equal height, without regard to affections or antipathies, and they dared not ask to be re-marshalled, even on a holiday, for fear of their lives. On they slouched, in their ill-made uniform; with dull, heavy eyes; with pale, puffed cheeks and drooping jaws; with the regulation orange in one hand, and the regulation bun in the other; and with looks that showed no enjoyment of the present, and no hope of the future.

Sir Tomahawk in due time, after the proper forms and ceremonies of an election, which was not contested, had been gone through, was declared duly elected. His coadjutor for the town and borough had paired off with another invalid ten years ago; since which time, although he was supposed to be taking the waters at a German bath, he had never been heard of, and Sir Tomahawk had therefore the dignity and advantages of his new position all to himself. This state of things did not last many months; for intelligence came at last of the death of the old member at some place abroad with a name containing many vowels, all dotted over the top, and which none of the Fogmoor people could pronounce. After a while, they awoke to a sense of the necessity and probable profit of another election. The preliminary steps were accordingly taken to secure the support of those Fogmoor colours which Sir Tomahawk had already nailed to the mast.

Sir Tomahawk also awoke to a sense of the necessity of bringing in a member who would not interfere with the designs that he himself had carefully laid for his own political advancement. Sir Tomahawk cast his eye over the political horizon and was very well satisfied with the prospect. He knew, or thought he knew, exactly what he could do with his brother, and what he could not. He thought

that, for a certain sum, he could secure the return of a gentleman of the scientific-tourist school, whose time would be chiefly divided between botany in the Himalayas, ethnology in Central America, and meteorology in the Arctic regions. If he hesitated for a moment it was because he feared that such a travelled Thane might interfere with his prospect, however remote, of one day being appointed to the Colonial Office. But, as he saw how fruitless it was to indulge in the hope of ever getting another member like the late shadowy legislator, he selected the tourist (whose name was Mr Kosmus) as the safest person to stand. Having first ascertained that Mr Kosmus was at a part of the globe where he could be reached by Telegraphic communication, he applied to him in that form; and finding him not unwilling to be nominated, he signed a guarantee for that gentleman's political faith to the Woolsack Club, and received the amount that he asserted would be sufficient to secure the election.

Sir Tomahawk considered that he had taken quiet and effectual possession of the field, and expected to carry his point without a contest. But Sir Tomahawk was doomed to be disappointed. Sir Tomahawk made a mistake in attempting to do too much himself, without either counsel or assistance. It is true that by this means privacy was ensured, as well as a large degree of profit; but success in an undertaking is the one thing needful, to which all other things should be made subservient. It is quite true that for a certain sum Mr Kosmus, or any man in the world, or even out of it, could have been returned for the borough of Fogmoor, provided no other man offered a larger sum. Here lay the mistake. Moreover, Sir Tomahawk's character was not one of those which come out the stronger in the face of opposition, and therefore I cannot wonder at his mental collapse, when, after a few days, by the side of his huge 'Vote for Kosmus' placards, was affixed a small, neat, printed notice, requesting the electors to support Mr Snarlington.

When Sir Tomahawk had quite recovered from his astonishment, the first question that he asked, loudly, was, 'Who is Mr Snarlington?' Who *was* Mr Snarlington? Who indeed! Certainly, fools and madmen would never die out of the land. Sir Tomahawk had no doubts: no misgivings. Why should he have? He waited, with a calm dignity of conscious strength, for the discomfiture of his obscure and presumptuous enemy.

CHAPTER II.



R SNARLINGTON'S movements had been prompt and characteristic. At ten o'clock, A.M., he determined to stand for the borough; at eleven o'clock, A.M., he was in a carriage at the railway station; at half-past three o'clock, P.M., he was in a cab at the London terminus; and at ten minutes to four, P.M., he was in the offices of Messrs Alabaster and Ermine, the unequalled electioneering agents.

No matter what a man's business may be,—thief-training or thief-catching; chess-playing or billiard-playing; curing smoky chimneys or building Elizabethan villas; making popular sausages or popular pills; filling out the walking skeleton with artificial flesh; tightening in the panting mass of too, too solid flesh, until its possessor is not only presentable, but elegant, in the eyes of his adorable Amelia; training bull-headed men for prize-fights, or preparing young clergymen for the polemical pulpit; breeding sleek terriers, who will kill a hundred rats in about two-thirds of the same number of seconds; useful businesses, elegant businesses, criminal businesses, improper businesses, mean, shabby, and sly businesses; no matter what profession a man may follow, if he be the first of his kind, he exacts and receives a certain amount of wonder and admiration, even from those who will tell you that they despise both him and his calling. It is right to be virtuous, it is good to be honest, it is better to have the world know that you are both virtuous and honest, but it is best of all to be notorious and celebrated.

Messrs Alabaster and Ermine were expensive; but they stood alone. The fiercest, keenest political opponent might walk round any case that came out of the skilful hands of Messrs Alabaster and Ermine, until his brain was dizzy; for not a flaw would he find; not a weak point; not so much as a pin-hole, which he could use to his advantage.

Everybody in the political world knew Messrs Alabaster and Ermine; and Messrs Alabaster and Ermine knew everybody in the political world. Yet, if you saw the political world, by which I mean the members of Parliament, past, present, and future, and the great electioneering agents walking in the streets, you would naturally come to the conclusion that Messrs Alabaster and Ermine knew nothing of the political world, and that the political world knew nothing of Messrs Alabaster and Ermine. They passed each other

without a nod, without a wink, without a glance. Their countenances were a vacancy—a blank.

Messrs Alabaster and Ermine had also an extensive acquaintance in any county of England, with the possessors of political birth-rights, whether east or west, north or south. At the private dinner-table of the partners they quoted the ten-pound householder like consols, or any other government stock. Sometimes he was at par, that is, exactly ten pounds; sometimes he went down to eight; seven; six; five-eighths; sometimes he recovered to ten; eleven; twelve; twelve and a-half; thirteen and a-quarter.

Mr Alabaster was a man of nearly seventy, still keen and active, but rather inclined to be fussy, and to dwell upon the political triumphs that he had contributed to in the past, rather than to devote his attention to the political necessities of the present. He had been in this business on his own account from a very early age, and had made a reputation before the passing of that great measure—the first Reform Bill—which was to have purified the land from electoral corruption for evermore. This was a great measure for Mr Alabaster. It increased the area of corruption, without making it so extensive as to be wholly and hopelessly unmanageable. It created more electors to be bribed. It brought forward capitalists as candidates for selection: and the great electioneering agent's business increased to such an extent, that he was compelled to take in a partner. He fixed upon Mr Ermine.

Mr Ermine was a man rather over fifty years of age. He was the managing and acting partner of the firm; sharp, decisive, pliable, versatile, and unrivalled for his judgment and powers of organization. No matter what came before him, he knew in a moment exactly what ought to be done, and he knew exactly how best to do it. Mr Alabaster had few scruples: Mr Ermine had no scruples whatever.

This was the firm, then, in whose offices Mr Snarlington now stood; and he was soon ushered into the presence of the two partners. He explained his errand in an instant

‘I must be returned for Fogmoor,’ he said, very abruptly. Mr Alabaster was rather shocked. Mr Ermine was not shocked in the least.

‘Fogmoor, Fogmoor,’ said Mr Alabaster, reflectively, turning over the pages of a volume partly printed and partly in manuscript. ‘Yes. Fogmoor, Hants. Population, sixteen thousand; electors, seven hundred and twenty. Exactly so, sir; exactly so.’

‘Price?’ inquired Mr Snarlington, in a voice sharp as the snap of a percussion cap.

Mr Alabaster started, Mr Ermine looked on unmoved. Mr Alabaster mumbled something about a letter of introduction—who were they dealing with?

‘Price?’ Mr Snarlington again almost shouted, taking a cheque-book from his pocket. ‘Two-thirds down in cash; balance on election.’

The production of the cheque-book pacified the partners. Mr Alabaster went on to say:

‘We’ve not had anything to do with Fogmoor, I think, since eighteen hundred and thirty-nine, when Lord Bilkington—’

‘Excuse me,’ interrupted Mr Snarlington, ‘but my time’s precious. You are men of business, and have got the purchase-money of Fogmoor marked in your books like the price of a landed estate. Tell me that price, and don’t beat about the bush.’

Mr Alabaster being staggered, Mr Ermine took up the conversation.

‘Who’s in the field?’ he asked.

‘Sir Tomahawk Sternhold,’ returned Mr Snarlington.

‘For himself?’

‘No; for a friend.’

‘That’s favourable.’

Mr Ermine turned to Mr Alabaster, and said contemptuously, ‘Sir Tomahawk Sternhold.’ He then turned to Mr Snarlington and said, ‘An amateur in our profession.’

‘Price?’ again asked Mr Snarlington.

‘Fogmoor,’ began Mr Alabaster, ‘was always a difficult place to deal with. I remember—’

‘Price?’ struck in the impatient Mr Snarlington.

‘Well,’ replied Mr Ermine, who had been gaining time for reflection, ‘we can’t do it securely for less than nine thousand pounds.’

‘Rather above the average for such places,’ said Mr Snarlington, as he drew a cheque for six thousand pounds; ‘but, no matter. Go to work at once.’

To work they went at once. Although they had an inferior and over-confident opponent to deal with, they anticipated every emergency that could possibly arise. The usual beer and refreshments were provided without stint for the coarser portion of the free and independent possessors of the political birthright. Subtle scruples of the higher classes were overcome in a masterly manner by Mr Ermine, who was a known and welcome visitor at every house in the

county. If any man during the fortnight of preparation for the day of election expressed a wish for a new horse, a new gun, a new plough, a new waggon, a new suit of clothes, a new cow, or a short lease of a cottage, he had it at once—he scarcely knew how. If any woman expressed a wish for a trip to London, a new gown, a new milking-pail, a new chest of drawers, a new carpet, or a new fit-out of boots for the children, she had it at once—she scarcely knew how. If any gentleman wished for a new writing-table, a new diamond ring, a new library chair, admission to an exclusive club, or a presentation for a son to a public school, he had it at once—he scarcely knew how. If any lady wished for a new piano, a new fan, a new toilet-glass, an Indian shawl, or an introduction to a circle of fashion, she had it at once—she scarcely knew how. Everybody was satisfied. Everybody was delighted. There had not been, for many years, such a charming election at Fogmoor. The arrangements beneath the surface were also perfect. While the contest lasted, it would have been a difficult task to find a single professional pugilist in the neighbourhood of the metropolis. They were all at Fogmoor; and, as they all mustered there in the Snarlington interest, peace and propriety were thoroughly respected.

CHAPTER III.



MR TOMAHAWK STERNHOLD presented a pitiable spectacle. He had sunk rapidly in Fogmoor popularity. He sat for hours in Mr Kosmus's chief committee-room without speaking a word to his fellow-labourers. When he met society in the drawing-room or in the street, he felt that he was not the individual of a few weeks before. One humiliation was spared him. He was not confronted with his opponent in the habitations of his friends; though he was not aware that Mr Snarlington's eccentricity had alone saved him from this unpleasantness. People judged of Mr Snarlington's wealth by what they saw going on around them, and there was not a door in the county that was now closed against him. Mr Snarlington's treatment of the borough and its inhabitants was severe, but it was well-merited. He had bought the suffrages of his townsmen at the full market-price, and he was not disposed to conceal his bitter contempt for a drove of political cattle. He was stern and unflinching in his determination not to observe any of the recognized, expected, and time-honoured amenities of elections.

His placards were small, and without any of the usual local flatteries. He would not trouble himself to make professions of any political principles whatever. He would not visit any important elector with the usual deputation, and would not address the inhabitants from any tavern window on the day of nomination. In his single speech he told them such disagreeable truths, that Sir Tomahawk, who did not know how securely every listening man had been bought, made sure of a triumph. Alas! by the middle of the polling-day six-sevenths of the possessors of the political birthright had recorded their faith in what they called the honest and straightforward candidate. The one-sided struggle was at an end, and Mr Snarlington was declared to be duly elected.

Mr Snarlington took the oaths and his seat for Fogmoor, and Sir Tomahawk Sternhold began to think that little was to be gained by keeping aloof from his fellow-member. He had been soundly rated by the committee of the Woolsack Club for his clumsy mismanagement of the election; and although he had defended himself pretty well, he felt that his position with the ministry had been materially injured. He was asked about the character and political principles of Mr Snarlington, and he could return nothing but vague and unsatisfactory answers. He saw the necessity of cultivating more intimate relations with his repulsive colleague, and he began to make overtures; but they were not met in the spirit he could have wished. Mr Snarlington bluntly told him that, as long as he remained in the House, he should act as an independent member. Sir Tomahawk might go his way, he should go his. He was pledged to nothing. He was bound to nobody. His borough was his own. He had bought it in the regular way, and he certainly intended to do what he liked with it. Sir Tomahawk had discernment enough to see that the case was hopeless. He withdrew from further solicitation, and fell back upon his dignity, his principles, and his title.

His title certainly did not go a great way; but his dignity—when he thought proper, as he did very frequently, to turn it on at the main—was ample and severe enough to do honour to a dukedom. His principles, in a great measure, were part and parcel of this dignity: they were born of it, and they drew their nourishment from it. Propounded by Sir Tomahawk they sounded imposing, and conveyed an impression of great political wisdom, combined with honesty of purpose and firmness of character. Propounded by any one else, their glitter and emptiness were at once discovered. This proved the value of the manner which could make such counterfeits pass current as

genuine coin, and showed the natural talent of Sir Tomahawk as a party legislator. They were rather numerous—these same principles—but that only enhanced his own value when he came to be purchased in the political market. A man with no honesty of purpose, with no firmness of character, with no political wisdom, and with no political convictions, is a worthless weed on the roadside of legislation, that may be gathered at any time, for little or no cost, by any ministry, for any purpose. But a man with all these advantages, and many others, can go into the open market, and boldly ask a heavy price, commensurate with the importance of that which he resigns or sells, and secure in the proud consciousness that he has demanded, and will obtain, his value.

One session passed, and Mr Snarlington was declared to be impracticable. One ministry had expired, and another had come into existence. Both of these Sir Tomahawk had supported, because he liked the men. Both of these Mr Snarlington had opposed, because he disliked the measures.

Another session passed and Mr Snarlington was declared to be factious. The second ministry had gone out, and the first ministry had been reinstated. Sir Tomahawk still supported them, because he liked the men; Mr Snarlington still opposed them, because he disliked the measures.

The third session had come, and nearly gone: the first ministry had again retired, to be replaced again by the second ministry. No other government was possible. There being only two parties, Power played at see-saw. Sir Tomahawk still supported men. Mr Snarlington still opposed bad measures. Hasty words had often been heard in the lobbies of the House coming from Sir Tomahawk, and addressed to Mr Snarlington, upon the perverse folly of making Fogmoor a shadowy nonentity in the State—Fogmoor once the envy, now the laughing-stock, of members who represented rival and happier boroughs. Sir Tomahawk might as well have railed at the stone statue of Hampden.

It was during the happy reign of this fourth ministry, and the period of this third session of Mr Snarlington's membership, that a cry was raised, in and out of the Legislature, for a new system of parliamentary reform. The ministry of course—like all ministries—were averse to change, and thought the present system absolutely perfect. There was no discontent in the country. Bread was eightpence the four-pound loaf. There was a decrease of pauperism to the extent of ten per cent. Therefore, the electoral system was absolutely

perfect. If any man got up in that House, and said that bribery, corruption, and unequal political privileges existed, with the beneficial operation of the first Reform Bill staring him in the face, he was an Obstructive ; unfit to dine at a minister's table ; incapable of grasping any great question.

Sir Tomahawk was very great upon this question ; of course upon the side of the ministers. If any man said that the possession of a vote would make a labourer happier, would whitewash his cottage, paint his street-door, give him a clean shirt, or a new hat, he only showed his lamentable ignorance. In Fogmoor he had never heard any wish expressed for an extension of the elective franchise. On the contrary, he knew thirteen men who had got the privilege, and yet were too lazy to use it. Mr Snarlington always smiled grimly when he heard Sir Tomahawk dilating upon Fogmoor as the model borough ; but he was a practical man, and never spoke in the House. If you wanted to know his opinions, you had to scrutinize his votes.

Ministers, having proved, through Sir Tomahawk Sternhold, and men of his stamp, that the present system was absolutely perfect ; they gave the finishing kick to the little knot of a dozen earnest, sincere reformers in the House, by putting up the jocular member to treat the subject with the contempt that it deserved. The jocular member, on this occasion, at the given signal—obedient as a clown in the circus—bounded into the political arena, with a grimace and a jest. His place was, however, pre-occupied by a gentleman who had caught the eye of the Speaker, and who was not a jocular member, but a feeble member—a character that in most cases answered the same purpose. He did not belong to the ministry, which was all the better for them ; the necessary laugh was raised without their having the trouble and responsibility (if any) of raising it.

The feeble member was not weak in his limbs : it was his mind that wanted strength. He was very undecided and variable. At times he thought he could trust the people with anything ; but, after reading an account in the daily papers of a case of wife-beating, he thought he could trust them with nothing. Then, reading an account in the evening papers of a child being nobly and gallantly saved by a working-man from certain death at a fire, his confidence revived, to last until the morning. Next morning, reading of a man being garotted in broad moonlight in a busy public thoroughfare, he was again afflicted with doubts, and walked down to the House with a shaking head.

When the feeble member stood up on this occasion, he fumbled

nervously, first in one pocket, and then in another. Now his hand was in the tails of his coat; now it was deep in the breast. 'God bless my soul!' he said. 'Hum! dear me! I've got a Reform Bill about me, somewhere. Very strange. I had a Reform Bill, I know, when I came out. No, I hadn't, either. And yet? I must, too. And yet I couldn't. I've never dropped it, I hope? No; here it is. No; it's a newspaper.'

Then addressing himself to the Speaker and the House, the feeble member said:—

'Sir,—I had a Reform Bill;—in fact, I've got a Reform Bill—but unfortunately I've left it at home on my dressing-table. It's too far to send; but, I think, if you will allow me, I can explain the scheme of it.' The great scheme, which had been left upon a dressing-table, or dropped in the streets, was then feebly explained.

Its chief characteristic was, that it treated the people like wild beasts, who were dangerous to themselves and to each other. They were to have a certain amount of liberty administered to them in very small doses, and with every precaution for the public safety. There was to be a good substantial Lodger Suffrage with a powerful checking agency; there was to be a Family Suffrage, by which a certain number of children were to count as one man, according to the sum total of their ages, also with a powerful, checking agency; and there was a variety of other eccentric popular concessions, all carefully guarded by checking agencies. The forces seemed so regulated that they pulled in opposite directions with equal power, leaving the thing to be moved exactly where it stood. It was evident, under this Reform Bill, the supply of independent voters would not be increased to any extent sufficient to bring down their standing price in the political market. It was evident, under this Reform Bill, that the exclusive character of that large club, which is popularly known by the title of the House of Commons, would not be altered in any degree, as the bill could not possibly operate to reduce the average eight thousand pounds which every member was obliged to pay, or get paid, as his entrance fee. Its introduction was negatived by a tremendous majority.

Amongst the absurd minority of twenty was Mr Snarlington: and the debate produced one remarkable effect; it forced a few words from the stolid member for Fogmoor.

He promised to bring the question of parliamentary reform before the House next session, according to his view of dealing with the subject. No one who heard him, paid much heed to what he said.

Sufficient for the session was the evil of the session. But Mr Snarlington's words had fallen upon the listening and astonished ear of Sir Tomahawk Sternhold; and that distinguished person sought his factious colleague immediately the debate was over.

'Mr Snarlington, sir,' began Sir Tomahawk in a tone of dignified and concentrated rage, 'it is now a period of three sessions—'

'And four ministries,' struck in Mr Snarlington, in a very unusual manner.

'No matter, sir,' returned Sir Tomahawk, sharply, annoyed at the interruption, 'no matter. It is now a period of three sessions since you were returned to join me in representing the interests of the borough of Fogmoor. I have fulfilled my trust to the best of my ability. Can you, sir, lay your hand upon your heart and say the same?'

Sir Tomahawk was very impressive. Mr Snarlington muttered that he was not in the habit of laying his hand upon his heart. He had not been in the House long enough to learn the trick.

'No, sir,' continued Sir Tomahawk in an oratorical manner, 'you cannot. You know, sir, that during all that time, Fogmoor has exhibited in the national Legislature, the undignified spectacle of a borough stultified by the opposing principles of its own members. It has paired off with itself; and, for all practical purposes, it might as well be blotted out of the map of—of—'

Before Sir Tomahawk could find the exact phrase he was in search of, Mr Snarlington interrupted by saying, that 'he thought it might.'

'Then, sir,' continued Sir Tomahawk, with more swelling dignity than ever, and striking at once at the point which he was working up to, 'with sentiments like these it is the duty—the bounden duty—of a man to resign. The greatest constitutional authorities——'

'You need say no more,' again interrupted Mr Snarlington, 'I intend to resign.'

The effect of these words upon Sir Tomahawk was electrical. He had not expected to tame the factious Mr Snarlington so rapidly. However, he went straight to his masters, the ministry, to report with pride his victory over the factious and impracticable member. Sir Tomahawk made certain arrangements with the Woolsack Club with regard to the new election for Fogmoor; and Mr Snarlington went first to Messrs Alabaster and Ermine, and then down to Fogmoor, to make his arrangements also.

CHAPTER IV.



FOGMOOR had, like many other country towns, its full share of paupers, and its full share of criminals. Amongst the latter class was a rough, grizzly vagabond, who was hustled about from door to door, from gaol to workhouse, and from workhouse to gaol; who was sometimes hungry and wretched, sometimes drunk and noisy; who was not without a certain rude power of intellect, and a certain dogged firmness of character. He stood by himself in the town, without a friend or a relation: and, as all traces of his original name was lost, he was known as Bill Manacles. He was classed among the criminal population of Fogmoor, because he had been in gaol, though for what crime was not very clear to the impartial examiner. Fogmoor justice, like a good many other things, was administered in a very loose and one-sided manner. It could scarcely be otherwise while Sir Tomahawk Sternhold was the most active and influential of the local magistrates.

Bill Manacles had formerly been in the service of the great Sir Tomahawk, at very low wages and with very heavy work, as a general labourer. It was not complained that he neglected his duties, nor that he was found out in any dishonesty, while at Sternhold Grange; but he called his mistress Mum, instead of My lady; he did not touch his hat to her, nor to Sir Tomahawk; and instead of making the very common mistake amongst the peasantry, of addressing his master by the wrong but pleasant title of My lord, he only called him plain Sir, and sometimes left out even this slight mark of veneration. Bill Manacles was considered by Sir Tomahawk and his lady to be a dangerous member of society; and he was not only discharged from their service, but convicted by his master (in his magisterial capacity) of carting some hay for a new employer on a Sunday, and safely lodged in gaol for three calendar months.

Bill Manacles was set at liberty at the end of that term, with a reputation hopelessly damaged. Meeting Sir Tomahawk and his lady driving in their open carriage one day without a servant, upon one of the country roads, Bill Manacles made towards them, to remonstrate upon his treatment, and to know what kind of a character they were going to give him, if he was offered any employment in and about Fogmoor. Bill looked ragged and dirty, and perhaps fierce; for hunger will give that appearance to the mildest countenance; but he meant no ill-play. The great Sir Tomahawk, how-

ever, was thrown into a state of singular alarm ; and, in his nervousness, he promised something—no matter what—and galloped off towards the friendly shelter of the town. That evening Bill Manacles was arrested on a charge of attempting highway robbery. He had no character and no witnesses ; while his accusers were the great Sir Tomahawk and his lady. The natural result was that Bill Manacles was sent to take his trial at the next assizes. Being in the same position there as he was at Fogmoor, he was sentenced to four years' penal servitude in the great prison at Portland. This prison being out of the reach of Sir Tomahawk's influence, Bill Manacles was pretty well treated ; and, as he conducted himself peaceably, he was, after a period of eighteen months' imprisonment (without any hypocritical dealing with the chaplain), presented with one of the modern diplomas, called a ticket-of-leave, which confers distinction upon a prisoner, and saves the country, for many years, the expense of his board and lodging. His prison had been a home to him ; but he was now sent into the world to seek his fortune.

Bill Manacles went to the town where he was best known, under the impression that his ticket-of-leave would be a passport to some kind of rough work, that would enable him to keep himself out of the workhouse. If not, he would, at any rate, be in his parish when the pangs of hunger came on—as come on they would—and ignorant as Bill Manacles was, he knew enough of the parochial system to be alive to the necessity of conforming to this strict and unalterable rule of the poor-law administrators.

Bill Manacles did not meet with a triumphant nor a hospitable reception at Fogmoor. Fogmoor begged to turn its back upon its prodigal son. Work there certainly was ; but not for a man with a ticket-of-leave—although a ticket-of-leave might be a trustworthy guarantee for its possessor's honesty and sobriety. Bill Manacles found the doors closed against him ; found nothing but shaking heads from the upper windows of the more pretentious dwelling-houses of the incorruptible borough burgesses ; saw children taken out of his way by anxious mothers ; was rebuked for idleness by stout shopkeepers, who were basking under sunblinds and living upon credit.

One morning, Bill Manacles, feeling very hungry, after a night passed in a barn, arose with a determination to apply to the workhouse for a breakfast. Going in the direction of that building, he was seen, for the first time since his return to Fogmoor, by Sir Tomahawk Sternhold, who had not the courage to address him. Sir Tomahawk pondered by what means his late disrespectful servant could be

again consigned to gaol, and went home, across the fields, to breakfast. Bill Manacles proceeded a little further undisturbed, when he came upon Mr Snarlington.

‘Bill Manacles,’ said the factious member for Fogmoor, ‘you’re going to the Union again, are you?’

‘Wull! I can’t get wurk,’ returned Bill, in the attitude of a badger.

‘Would you like to go into the House of Commons?’ asked Mr Snarlington.

‘Noa?’ said Bill, savagely; ‘I’ve on’y just cum owt o’ gaol.’

‘It’s not a prison,’ replied Mr Snarlington, sarcastically; ‘there’s no treadmill—nothing but orators.’

‘Wull, measter,’ returned Bill, slightly pacified, ‘I wunt wurk, and I wunt summat to ate.’

‘Come with me, then,’ said Mr Snarlington; and he led the way along the lane to his own house.

Bill had a substantial breakfast, which made him feel comfortable; he had a good wash, which made him feel decent; and he had a cast-off coat of Mr Snarlington’s given him, which made him feel respectable.

Mr Snarlington explained his views to Bill Manacles; and Bill, although he did not half comprehend the scheme that was briefly laid before him, being perfectly satisfied with his quarters, his treatment, and his patron, pledged his word and his ticket-of-leave to stand by anything that was required of him.

CHAPTER V.



THE next day, Mr Snarlington formally resigned his political trust into the hands of his free and independent constituents. Sir Tomahawk was in such raptures, that he forgot all about Bill Manacles, was positively amiable to his inferiors—that is, to all the town of Fogmoor—and immediately put his friend Mr Kosmus again in nomination. The same evening, towards dusk, Messrs Alabaster and Ermine arrived, and took up their quarters at Mr Snarlington’s villa. Bill Manacles, having been installed as a resident, was taking his supper quietly and thankfully in the kitchen.

Over the wine, in his snug dining-room, Mr Snarlington opened the business of the night.

‘The person I have selected to be returned in my place for the borough of Fogmoor is one Bill Manacles—a ticket-of-leave man.’

Mr Ermine, with a little more difficulty than usual, preserved his accustomed composure; but Mr Alabaster grew livid, and spilled his port.

‘A—a—ticket-of-leave man?’ inquired Mr Alabaster, in a tremulous voice.

Mr Ermine was making some pencil calculations upon a small slip of paper, and said nothing.

‘Exactly so,’ returned Mr Snarlington.

‘It is now upwards of fifty years,’ began Mr Alabaster in reply, becoming gradually more composed, ‘since I began my professional career; and, during all that time——’

‘Can we see the man?’ asked Mr Ermine, interrupting his retrospective partner.

Mr Snarlington rang a bell; and, in a few seconds, the proposed member for Fogmoor stood in the doorway.

‘Bill,’ said his patron, ‘take a chair.’

Bill did as he was requested. He looked cleaner than he did the day before; but he was still rough and grizzly.

‘And this is the man,’ said Mr Alabaster, addressing Mr Snarlington, ‘who is to have the honour of representing Fogmoor?’

‘I doant know much about the ’onour, measter, either,’ struck in Bill Manacles, annoyed at Mr Alabaster’s tone. ‘Fogmoor be a dirty place at best o’ times.’

‘Do you wish to ask him any question?’ inquired Mr Snarlington.

Mr Ermine said ‘No;’ while Mr Alabaster muttered, reflectively, ‘A ticket-of-leave man!’

‘Bill,’ said Mr Snarlington to the proposed member, ‘you can go!’

When he had left the room, Mr Snarlington turned to the two partners, and took up the conversation by saying, in a manner unusually lively for him:—

‘Bill Manacles and Fogmoor, gentlemen! Will you favour me with the price?’

‘Mr Snarlington,’ said Mr Ermine, ‘this will be a task requiring uncommon tact and perseverance.’

‘Mr Ermine,’ said Mr Snarlington, ‘you know that an orang-outang may be returned for Fogmoor at a certain price.’

‘Mr Snarlington,’ said Mr Alabaster, ‘since the notorious case of the prize-fighter, who was elected for the town of Bumpsley-in-the-Mud, in eighteen hundred and ——’

‘Mr Alabaster,’ said Mr Snarlington, ‘I do not wish to press for your terms until the morning. Good night!’

Saying which Mr Snarlington left his guests, and went to bed.

The next morning at breakfast Mr Ermine alone met Mr Snarlington. Mr Alabaster had returned to town.

‘Sir,’ said Mr Ermine, ‘we have arranged that I shall undertake this election individually, as a matter of policy on the part of the firm. This case may attain a disagreeable notoriety—though I do not anticipate that it will—and it is better that only one of our firm should be engaged in it. My price, sir, to guarantee the election of Mr William Manacles—that, I believe, is his name?—will be twenty thousand pounds; fifteen thousand down.’

‘Sir,’ said Mr Snarlington, ‘in the present state of political morality, any notoriety you may obtain from this case will only add to the extent and profits of your business. You shall have your price.’

Saying which, Mr Snarlington drew a cheque for fifteen thousand pounds, and the election of Bill—or, as he was now called, Mr William—Manacles, was considered to be a settled thing.

Sir Tomahawk Sternhold, seeing no signs of an opponent, on the surface, for nearly ten days, began to lull himself with a false idea of security. This was one of his weaknesses—a natural tendency to indolence. He suffered also from over-confidence and a desire to retain some portion of the funds entrusted to him to manage the election.

The Woolsack Club were not, by any means, liberal with their money when it had to come out of the pockets of the members for the support of the party they represented. If it was the national finances, then no one had reason to complain of a pinching and an unwise economy. But Fogmoor was not a dockyard station, or a government dépôt. Fogmoor, to be won for the Woolsack Club, must be won with money of the Woolsack party. The sum therefore placed at Sir Tomahawk Sternhold’s disposal was no more than the average price of the Fogmoor voters during the last fifty elections. Bearing in mind Sir Tomahawk’s last failure, the Woolsack Club had not trusted him entirely with the management of the business, but had secured the services of an electioneering agent, named Weasel. Mr Weasel was a clever enough man in his way, and a cheap man; but, no more to compare with Mr Ermine, as he himself well knew, than a government can compare with an individual like Mr Snarlington in securing an election like that for Fogmoor.

So matters went on for nearly ten days. At the end of that time, when the inhabitants of Fogmoor arose one morning, they observed the walls in and about the town placarded with the following bill: 'Vote for William Manacles, the Man of the People!'

The population of the town and borough were rather astonished at these bills: but the seven hundred and twenty of their number, who formed the elective body, had been already prepared, in several ways, for the announcement. Small printed notes had been sent round, exhorting them to abstain from pledges. This they were sure to do; for a Fogmoor man never sold himself until the last moment, and when there was no chance of a higher bidder. They were told to look out for a coming man—a thoroughly popular candidate—and a stout man in a dark wig (the thin, gray Mr Ermine, in disguise), was the gentleman who called and told them this. Mr Weasel observed him; but, as he did not recognize his opponent, confidence was not broken up in the camp of Sir Tomahawk Sternhold.

When Sir Tomahawk saw the bills that placarded the town, he recognized the name, and at once formed the supposition—he was fond of suppositions—that Mr Snarlington had regretted having resigned his seat, when it had become too late, and was now spending a few pounds in order to distract and annoy.

'A stupid squib!' he exclaimed.

Therefore, the only additional step he took in the interest of his candidate, was to issue sarcastic placards: such as 'Vote for the Ticket-of-Leave Candidate!' 'Vote for Bill Manacles, and Highway Robbery!' 'Vote for the Convict, and Universal Burglary!'

In the mean time the day of election approached. William Manacles did not seem to understand one-fourth of what he heard was going on in his name; but he was quite ready to go out and fight his own battles, if they had allowed him to do so. He was, however, kept quiet, for the present, in the Snarlington Villa—well fed, well housed, and well clothed.

CHAPTER VI.



It was now Saturday, and the nomination day was the following Monday. Mr Ermine had been making very satisfactory progress in disguise; but there was still much left for him to do. Fogmoor, like every other town, had got its cliques and leaders; although every man looked pretty sharply

after his own interest. But electors found they could get the best price for their political birthright, by combining in small numbers. Instead of a reduction being made upon taking a quantity, the rule was reversed, and twenty people in the bulk commanded a higher figure than twenty people in detail. Union is strength.

First in importance was the respectable people; people who had their scruples; people who were not really better than their neighbours, but who liked to keep up appearances; people who were dogs, but who did not want the ill name that led to the halter. The leader of this small, compact, and exorbitant party was Mr Simon Elderbury, a serious grocer. Mr Ermine paid him a visit on the Saturday.

‘William Manacles,’ said Mr Elderbury, with a sigh of pity, ‘was always a sad reprobate in Fogmoor.’

‘He is reformed,’ returned Mr Ermine.

‘Ah!’ exclaimed the serious grocer, sighing more heavily than before, ‘if I could only think so—if we could only think so!’

‘Is there any test,’ asked Mr Ermine, ‘that you would like to apply?’

‘It is not our place, Mr Ermine, to judge our fellow-creatures; but, if we could only see him amongst us at chapel to-morrow, we should feel more confident.’

Mr Ermine promised that this very reasonable and proper desire should be gratified; and, the next day (Sunday), William Manacles, the reformed ticket-of-leave man, was one of the morning and evening congregation at Ichabod Chapel, Fogmoor.

Another class, who had no pretensions to be compared with the last, were content to leave the management of their interest in the election in the experienced hands of a stout innkeeper named Hodges. Mr Hodges had framed himself, as closely as possible, upon the traditional character of John Bull. His voice was loud. He was inclined to be argumentative and dogmatical, and he wished everybody to take notice, that he never did anything he was ashamed of.

‘You never find any nonsense, Mr Ermine,’ said Mr Hodges, ‘in dealing with me. I ask a fair price, and I stick to it.’

‘So you do, Mr Hodges,’ returned Mr Ermine, ‘so you do; I will say that.’

‘My price is higher now than it was last election, and why? Because my family, and the families of those who’ve put the thing into my hands, have increased, Mr Ermine.’

‘No doubt, Mr Hodges, no doubt of it.’

‘Live and let live, that’s my maxim,’ continued Mr Hodges. ‘A man’s got his children to keep: very well. A man’s got a vote. Very well: so he ought to have. A gent offers him forty pound for that vote. Very well: it’s his duty to take it.’

‘So it is, Mr Hodges, so it is,’ answered Mr Ermine.

‘Suppose he doesn’t take it?’ went on Mr Hodges. ‘Very well: taxes come in: he can’t pay ’em. His children want schooling: he can’t give it ’em. That man’s done a hinjury to his country, and a hinjury to his family. That’s the way to put it.’

‘Quite true, Mr Hodges, quite true.’

‘I’m never ashamed of what I do. There’s forty-one votes at a price. You know me. I can do a’most anything with my friends. If I say it’s right, it’s right.’

When the conversation reached this point (for which Mr Ermine had been patiently waiting), he closed the bargain without further delay, and went on securing other electors.

Saturday passed in ceaseless activity; Sunday came and went in apparent calm and peace, but really in ceaseless activity also. This was Mr Ermine’s great day for dinner-table and tea-table negotiations, and he made the most of it. Monday morning arrived, and the first thing that Mr Ermine did was to show himself, without his disguise, at a prominent window of an apartment that had been for some time engaged, but had not been ostensibly used until that hour, as the chief committee-room of Mr William Manacles. In this position, as he had intended, he was seen and recognized by Mr Weasel. Mr Weasel rushed breathlessly to Sir Tomahawk Sternhold. Sir Tomahawk was in his dressing-gown and slippers, calmly sipping chocolate.

‘It’s all over!’ said Mr Weasel, forgetting, in his unnerved state, to address his principal by his rightful title.

‘Sir!’ returned Sir Tomahawk, with all his dignity turned powerfully on at the main.

‘Ermine’s in Fogmoor,’ was the conclusive reply. The sound of that name closed the main which had sustained the superhuman dignity of Sir Tomahawk Sternhold; and the whole of that stately fabric immediately collapsed upon an ottoman.

‘Bill Manacles,’ continued Mr Weasel, sinking also into a chair, ‘has got a regular committee-room. I saw Mr Ermine at the window. Great man—great artist!’ Mr Weasel’s fear of, was only surpassed by his admiration for, Mr Ermine.

Sir Tomahawk recovered slowly, and made a few fussy suggestions;

but evidently 'considered the battle already half lost. Mr Weasel could say nothing except, 'great artist—great artist!' Sir Tomahawk put on his boots, and hastened to Mr Kosmus's committee-room. Mr Weasel followed.

CHAPTER VII.



IN the great day, William Manacles was certainly the popular candidate with the crowd assembled at the hustings. This was part of the Fogmoor population, who had got large political sympathies, but no votes. The electors were too busy in clenching bargains, and making the most of the valuable privilege which Parliament, in its wisdom, had conferred upon their small body, to idle away their time in a surging mob.

William Manacles made a short speech in the choicest and most forcible language. At least, it was so reported in the local newspapers. William Manacles was much cheered. Sir Tomahawk Sternhold had prepared a long speech, full of eloquent denunciations, many of which he had learnt by heart from Burke and Chatham; but one single, rotten egg—the only one allowed to be fired by Mr Ermine, who had bought up every egg in the town—stuck upon the pure white waistcoat of the honourable member for Fogmoor, and so disconcerted him, that he forgot his oration and retired from the platform in disgust, amidst the derisive applause of the populace.

Never was a Fogmoor election carried with such delightful unanimity, as that which returned William Manacles, the Man of the People. Commercial travellers, who came from London with heavy demands upon Fogmoor tradesmen, had reason to bless that event; for they went away with an unusual amount of cash in their pockets.

But the most surprising thing was, that the thirteen—the only honest men in Fogmoor; who had never voted for any candidate, believing all to be equally bad; and who were alluded to by Sir Tomahawk in his celebrated speech on the new Reform Bill—came up and voted in a body for William Manacles. They did not condescend to give their reasons; but I think they must have acted under the belief that, when things come to the worst, they are likely to mend.

Intelligence soon spread far and wide that Bill Manacles was

returned ; though it was not every one who had an exact idea of what had recently taken place in Fogmoor.

An old male pauper, passing some almshouses outside the town, was interrogated by two old, half-deaf women, about the cause of the flow of people up and down the roads.

‘I doan’t exactly know,’ he said, ‘but they be sending Bill Manacles, I think, as our member to Parli’ment.’

‘Ah!’ said one of the old women, ‘I knew he’d never come to ony good!’

‘I knew,’ said the other, ‘he’d soon get hissel’ in trouble agen.’

This conversation conveyed the sense of a small portion of the population ; but the rest had a keen appreciation of what had been done, and gloried in Sir Tomahawk Sternhold’s defeat, and in the humiliation of Fogmoor.

That unfortunate knight quietly accepted his discomfiture ; and, dreading to meet both the Woolsack Club and the neighbouring gentry, he fled with his lady to a remote part of the continent. While there, some court acquaintances, who had known him in better days—more to sustain the dignity of their order, than out of love or respect for him—obtained for him the appointment of plenipotentiary at Sierra Leone. He was glad to accept it, and to resign his seat for Fogmoor. Thus ended all his ambitious projects.

Mr Snarlington, by the assistance of Messrs Alabaster and Ermine, procured his own election once more for Fogmoor, in the place of Sir Tomahawk Sternhold, and was returned in time to introduce Bill Manacles, the ticket-of-leave member, and man of the people, at the opening of the new parliamentary session. There was much sensation in the House when Bill made his appearance. Many eye-glasses were directed at him. Some young and thoughtless members laughed ; but the old hands frowned, and were very severe in their tone when they alluded to the honourable members for Fogmoor.

On the third night of the session, Mr Snarlington rose to redeem his pledge of bringing the question of parliamentary reform again before the House. His speech began thus :—

‘Mr Speaker,—I have the doubtful honour of representing Fogmoor, as one of its members ; but, as every man in this House is well aware, there are some hundreds of Fogmoors dotted about the country. An ordinary Fogmoor election costs nine thousand pounds ; for twenty thousand pounds a ticket-of-leave man may be returned ; for

twenty-five thousand pounds we might bring amongst us a Zulu Kaffir, and for thirty thousand pounds——'

Here the orator was interrupted by all the howling and ventriloquism which the Commons of England in Parliament assembled can so readily command; but which was powerless to drown the Stentorian 'he-ur, he-ur,' of Bill Manacles. Mr Snarlington sat down. The ministers were undecided; the House was silent; the jocular member was not to be found; the feeble member fainted, and the discussion was adjourned.

MY LOST HOME.

IN the still hours of the night; in the evening rest from labour—when the twilight shadows darken my solitary room, and oftentimes in the broad glare of day, amongst the eager, busy merchants upon 'Change—it comes before me: the picture of my lost shadowy home. So dim and indistinct at times seems the line that separates my past from my present self; so dream-like seem the events that have made me the hunted outcast which I am, that, painful as my history is, it is a mental relief to me to go over it step by step, and dwell upon the faces of those who are now lost to me for evermore.

It seems but yesterday—although many years have passed away—that I was in a position of trust in the counting-house of Askew, Dobell, and Picard. A quaint, old, red-brick house it was; standing in a court-yard, up a gateway, in a lane in the City, leading down to the river. I see it as plainly as if it stood before me now, with the old cherubim carving over the door-way; the green mossy stones in the yard; the twelve half-gallon fire-buckets hanging up, all painted with the City arms; the long, narrow windows, with their broad, flat wooden frames; the dark oaken rooms, especially the one where I used to sit, looking out into the small, square burial-ground of a church, with half-a-dozen decayed, illegible tombstones; frail memorials of old Turkey merchants, who were born, who lived, and who died under the shadow of the one melancholy tree that waved before my window; the long dark passages, with more fire-buckets; and the large fireplaces, with their elaborate fluted marble mantelshelves and pilasters.

I entered the service of those old merchants about the age of sixteen, fresh from the Blue-Coat School; a raw, ungainly lad, with no knowledge or experience of the world, and with a strong letter of recommendation from the head master, which procured me a junior clerkship. Our business was conducted with a steady tranquillity—an almost holy calm—in harmony with the place, which had the air of a sacred temple dedicated to commerce. I rose step by step; till at last, about the age of thirty, I attained the position of a first-class clerk. My advance was not due to any remarkable ability that I had displayed; nor because I had excited the interest of any member of the firm, for I seldom saw the faces of my employers. It was purely the result of a system which ordained a general rise throughout the house when any other clerk died, or was pensioned off. Old Mr Askew, the founder of the house—a man, so tradition said, who had once been a porter at the doorway which now owned him for master—had practically retired from business to a similar quaint old mansion at Stoke Newington. He never came to the City more than twelve times a-year, to inspect the monthly balances; and then he only remained about an hour. He did not even know the names of half the people in his employment. Mr Dobell, the second partner, was twenty years younger than Mr Askew; active, decisive, and retiring: a man whose whole mind was devoted to his business, and who looked upon us all as only so many parts of a machine for carrying out his objects. The third partner in the firm, Mr Picard, was a man of a very different stamp from the other two. At one period he had been our managing clerk, and he obtained his share in the business in the same year that I entered the house. He was of French extraction; thin, sallow, with small gray eyes, and light sandy hair. His age, at the time I am writing of, must have been near fifty. Although his origin was very obscure—some of our old clerks remembering him walking about the docks in an almost shoeless state—his pride was very great, and his harshness, sternness, and uneasy, fretful, and ever-conscious attempts at dignity, were a painful contrast to the quiet, off-hand manner of Mr Dobell, or the venerable and dreamy calmness of old Mr Askew. He was a bad-hearted, cold, calculating man—a man with a strong, reckless will; who allowed nothing to stand between him and his self-interest. When he came into authority, and had his name put up as one of the firm, his humble relations were removed to a distance; and a poor old Irishwoman, who had kept a fruit-stall upon sufferance under our gateway for many years, was swept away, because he felt that she remembered him in the days of his poverty.

My position and duties required me to live in the house, and to take charge of the place. When I married, I took my wife, Esther, to our old City home, and our one child, little Margaret, was born there. The child was a little blue-eyed, fair-haired thing; and it was a pleasing sight to see her, between two and three years of age, trotting along the dark passages, and going carefully up the broad oaken stairs. On one occasion she was checked by the order of Mr Picard for making a noise during business hours; and, from ten to five, she had to confine herself to her little dingy room at the top of the house. She was a great favourite with many of the old childless clerks, who used to bring her presents of fruit in the summer mornings. Scarcely a day passed but what I stole an hour—my dinner hour—to play with her; and, in the long summer evenings, I carried her down to the river to watch the boats. Sometimes, on Sundays, I took her out of the City into the fields about Canonbury, and carried her back again loaded with buttercups. She was a companion to me—oftentimes my only companion, with her innocent prattle, and gentle, winning ways—for my wife, Esther, was cold and reserved in her manners, with settled habits, formed before our marriage. She was an earnest Baptist, and attended regularly, three times a-week, a chapel for that persuasion, in Finsbury. My home often looked cheerless enough, when little Margaret had retired to bed, and my wife's empty chair stood before me; but I did not complain—it would not have been just for me to do so—for I knew Esther's opinions and habits before I married her; yet I thought I discerned, beneath a hard sectarian crust, signs of a true, womanly, loving heart; signs, amongst the strict faith and stern principles, of an affection equal to my own. I may have been mistaken in her, as she was mistaken—oh, how bitterly mistaken—in me! Her will was stronger than mine, and it fretted itself silently, but incessantly, in vain endeavours to lead me along the path she had chosen for herself. She may have misunderstood my resistance, as I may have misapprehended her motives for desiring to alter my habits and tone of thinking. There were probably faults and errors on both sides.

Thus we went on from day to day; Esther going in her direction and I going in mine, while the child acted as a gentle link that bound us together.

About this time Mr Askew finally retired from business, and there was a general step upward throughout the house: Mr Picard getting one degree nearer absolute authority. The first use that he made of his new power was to introduce an only son into the counting-house

who had not been regularly brought up to the ranks of trade; but who had received, since his father's entrance as a member of the firm, a loose, hurried, crammed, half-professional education, and who had hovered for some time between the choice of a lawyer's office and a doctor's consulting-room. He was a high-spirited young man, whose training had been of that incomplete character, which had only served to unsteady him. He had his father's fault of a strong, reckless will, unchecked by anything like his father's cold, calculating head; though tempered by a virtue that his father never possessed—an open-hearted generosity. As he had everything to learn, and was a troublesome pupil, he was assigned to my care. His writing-table was brought into my office, and I had plenty of opportunity of judging of his character. With all his errors and shortcomings—not to say vices—it was impossible not to like him. There is always a charm about a free, impulsive nature that carries the heart where the judgment cannot follow. Surrounded, as I had been for so many years, by the restraints imposed by persons who made me feel that they were my masters, and with little congeniality and sympathy in my domestic relations, I gave myself up, perhaps too freely and unreservedly, to the influence of young Mr Picard's society. Although more than ten years his senior, I held and claimed no authority over him; his more powerful will and bolder spirit holding me in subjection. I screened the fact of his late arrivals, and his frequent absences, by doing his work for him; and, for anything that Mr Dobell or his father knew, he was the most promising clerk in the house. Little Margaret soon found him out, and took a childish liking to him. He was never tired of playing with her; and seldom a week passed that he did not bring her something new in the shape of toys or sweetmeats. My evenings at home, which used to be solitary, were now solitary no longer: either he came and kept me company, unknown to his father—who would have been indignant at his associating with one of the ordinary clerks—or (which was most frequently the case) I accompanied him in his evening rambles about town. The gulf between me and Esther was greatly widened.

Thus our lives went on in the old City mansion, with little variety, until our child completed her third year.

Young Mr Picard had been absent from the office for more than a week, and illness, as usual, was pleaded as the cause. In about four days more, he returned, looking, certainly, much thinner and paler than usual. I did not question him then as to the real cause of his absence; for there were arrears to work up, and he did not seem in a

communicative humour. This was on a Saturday. On the following Monday, at about two o'clock in the afternoon, he brought in a cheque for five hundred pounds, drawn by the firm upon our bankers, Messrs Burney, Holt, and Burney, of Lombard Street. This, he told me, was an amount he had got his father and Mr Dobell to advance him for a short period, to enter upon a little speculation on his own account, and he gave it to me to get changed when I went down to the bankers to pay in money on the same afternoon. In the mean time he induced me to give him two hundred pounds on account, out of the cash that I, as cashier, had received during the day. Shortly afterwards he went away, saying he would receive the other portion in the morning. I went to the bankers that afternoon, cashed the cheque for five hundred pounds, returned the two hundred to my cash charge, paid it in to the credit of the firm, and returned to the office with the three hundred pounds in my possession, in bank-notes, for young Mr Picard when he came in the morning. I never saw him again, and never shall, in this world.

As to the cheque—it was a forgery. The bankers had discovered it later in the evening, and I was taken into custody, with the bank notes in my pocket-book, by a Bow Street officer, acting under Mr Picard senior's orders. My wife was not at home. Casting, therefore, one hurried glance at my poor, unconscious, sleeping child—a glance in which were concentrated the love and agony of a lifetime—I turned my back upon the old house to go with the officer to the appointed prison.

The next morning, at the preliminary examination before a magistrate, the charge was made out. I gave my explanation; but young Mr Picard was not to be found, and unsupported as I was by any evidence, with a string of circumstances so strongly against me, what could I expect? I was fully committed, and removed to Newgate to take my trial at the ensuing sessions.

Prostrated with grief and shame, I passed the first night in my dismal cell, in stupor rather than sleep; broken by thoughts of my lost home. My poor dear child seemed to me to be removed to an immeasurable distance—to belong to another world—and even my cold, passionless wife appeared in warmer and more wifely colours, and my heart was softened towards her. I felt as if I had left her, in the morning, full of health and strength, and had returned at nightfall to find her dead. I had gone carefully back through my past life, recalling opportunities that I had purposely avoided for reconciliation; magnifying little tendernesses of hers into acts of

great and loving kindness, and dwelling with self-reproach upon those bitter hours when I resented what I thought was cold indifference.

In the morning I was fully aroused from my dream to the horrors of my position. I was innocent in the eyes of Heaven—innocent in the eyes of the law; but, for all that, I had met by anticipation the fate of the commonest felon. I was innocent, at present, in the eyes of the law; but I was herded without discrimination with the vilest outcasts of society. My short diurnal walk was taken in the common prison-yard, with burglars, pickpockets, and all the varied shapes of crime, and I was thankful when I was not dogged by the bloody footsteps of the murderer. Although innocent, at present, in the eyes of the law, I had to take my share in administering the internal economy of my prison. I had to scrub and wash and keep cleanly a portion of the gaol, lest any physical taint should come where there was so much moral pollution. I had to take my turn in sweeping the yard, that the dainty feet of the professional thief might not be soiled with his morning's promenade. Even now, after the lapse of years, worn down as I am by sorrow and long suffering, when I think of the treatment I received while awaiting my trial, my blood boils.

The first morning, at the visiting half-hour allowed by the prison regulations, from twelve to half-past, I was stopped in my short impatient walk by hearing my name called by the turnkey: my wife had come to see me. I went to the grating where stood many of my fellow-prisoners talking to their wives and friends, and making room against the bars, I brought myself face to face with Esther. There, outside another barrier, between which and my own walked the officer on duty, she stood with her cold passionless face looking sterner and paler than usual; her thin lips firmly compressed, and her keen gray eyes fixed upon me with a searching, dubious expression. Thinking of the place I was in, and the character of my companions, whose voices, without one tone of sorrow or remorse, were busy around me; feeling cold, dirty, and miserable, and looking from all this upon Esther as she stood there before me in her Quakerish dress, and neat, clean respectability, I wavered for a moment in the belief of my innocence, and felt that there was an impassable gulf between us, which my desponding heart told me would never be bridged over.

'Esther,' I said, 'has young Mr Picard been heard of? Is little Margaret well? Do my employers really believe me guilty?'

'Randall,' she answered, in a calm, clear voice, 'your own heart must tell you whether young Mr Picard will ever be found. Our

child, thank God, is well, and too young to know the great grief and shame that have fallen on us. Mr Dobell has carefully avoided speaking to me upon the subject of your suspected crime, but Mr Picard believes you guilty.'

Though I could not clearly see the expression of her face, broken up as it was into isolated features by the double row of intervening bars, I felt that her eyes were fixed curiously upon me, and the tone of her voice, as she said this, told me that I was suspected—suspected even of crime far deeper than forgery! A cold shudder passed across my heart, and the old feeling of antagonism came back again to harden me.

'Randall,' she continued in the same emotionless tone, 'some money that I had saved for the child, I have devoted to your defence, and to procuring you certain comforts which you will sadly need here. If you are guilty, pray to be forgiven: if you are innocent, pray—as I and Margaret will pray—that this dark cloud may pass from us.'

Her voice lingered in my ear, although she had left the place. I returned to pace the stone yard of the prison. At night, as I lay awake upon the hard bed, those cold words, so full of duty but so wanting in love, still rang in my ears, resting like bars of lead upon my heart. In a neighbouring cell were two cheerful rogues, free from all mental care, calmly planning crimes yet unperpetrated. A dark, defiant spirit was on my soul. I thought, perhaps, I should have been as happy, if I had been as guilty as they. I fell into a short, uneasy sleep, in which little Margaret appeared to me standing at the gateway of the old mansion, with her slight dress fluttering in the wind. She was looking up and down the lane, and crying for a missing friend who did not come; and the faces of the cherubim in the carving over the gate were turned in pity upon her.

Twice again Esther visited me: still with the same story—for young Mr Picard had not been found; still with the same tone; still with the same look. At length, the day of trial came. As I stood in the dock, the first person my eye fell upon in the court was Mr Picard; his sallow face looking sallow than ever, his small gray eyes peering quickly and sharply about him. He was there to watch over his family honour; to obtain a conviction at any cost, and to favour the belief that I had either murdered his son, or had compelled him to keep out of the way. Esther was there too, following the proceedings with quiet intensity; her face fixed as marble, and her eyes resting upon me the whole time without a tear. It was over at last, the long painful trial, and I was convicted; sentenced to trans-

portation for life. I saw the triumph on Mr Picard's features; and, with glazed eyes, I saw Esther leave the court with her dark veil closely drawn over her face. She stooped, and, I thought, sobbed; but I saw her no more. In a few weeks I was on the high seas, proceeding to a penal settlement. Often in the dead of night the vision of my fatherless child weeping in the gateway of the old mansion passed before me, and sometimes I heard her little gentle voice in the wailing of the wind. The veil had fallen over my lost home never to rise again—never but once—years after.

Our vessel never reached her destination. She was wrecked in the third month of our voyage, and all on board, except myself and another convict, were lost. We were picked up by an American vessel; and, keeping our secret as to what we were, we were landed safely in New York. My companion went his way, and I entered the service of a storekeeper, and worked steadily for four years—four long years, in which the vision of my lost home was constantly before me. Any feeling of resentment that I may have felt at the suspicions of my wife, and at her seeming indifference to my fate, was now completely obliterated by the operation of time and distance, and the old love I gave to her as a girl, came back in all its tenderness and force. She appeared to me as the guardian and protector of my dear fatherless child, whom I had left sleeping innocently in her little bed on the night when the door of my lost home closed upon me. My dreams by night, my one thought by day, grew in intensity, until I could resist the impulse no longer. Risking the chance of discovery, I procured a passage, and landed in London in the winter of the fifth year from that in which I had left England.

I took a lodging at a small public-house at Wapping, near the river; and I neglected no means to escape observation. I waited with a beating, anxious heart impatiently for night; and, when it came, I went forth well disguised, keeping along the line of docks and silent warehouses, until I reached the end of the lane in which the old mansion stood. I did not dare to make any inquiry to know if Esther and the child were still at the old home; but my knowledge of the character and prospects of my wife, told me that, if the firm had allowed her to stay, she would have accepted the offer, as her principles and determination would have sustained her under any feeling of disgrace. I walked slowly up the old familiar lane, until I stood before the gateway. It was near eight o'clock, and the gate was closed, but it looked the same as it did when I first knew it as a boy; so did the quaint oak carving, and the silent court-yard, seen through

the small grating. There were no lights in the front, and I went cautiously round, up a side lane, and along a narrow passage that ran between the churchyard and the back of the house. At that moment the church clock struck eight, and the bells chimed the Evening Hymn, slowly and musically, as they had done, perhaps, for centuries; slowly and musically, as they had done in the days gone by, while I sat at the window with little Margaret in my arms, nursing her to sleep. A flood of memories came across my heart. Forgetful of the object that had brought me there, I leant against the railings and wept.

The chimes ceased, and the spell was broken. I was recalled to the momentous task that lay before me. I approached, with a trembling step, the window of what used to be our sitting-room on the ground-floor. I saw lights through the crevices of the closed shutters. Putting my ear closely against the wall I heard the hum of voices. Faint, confused, and indistinct as the sound was, something—perhaps the associations of the place—made me feel that I was listening to my wife and child. I was startled by the sound of footsteps; and, turning my eyes in the direction of the entrance to the passage (it had but one entrance), I saw approaching, an old man, who had been in the service of the firm, as house porter, for fifty years. He was called blind Stephen; for, though not totally blind, his eyes had a stony, glazed appearance. He had lived so long in the house that he would have died if he had been removed; and, in consideration of his lengthened service, he was retained, by Mr Askew's special commands. This was before I left, and I presumed, from finding him there, that he was still at his old duty; coming round to see, or rather feel, that all was secure before retiring for the night. I shrank against the wall with the hope of avoiding discovery: not that I feared the consequences of being recognized by Stephen—for I had many claims upon his kindness and sympathy—but that I dreaded, although I longed, to hear what he might have to tell me. He came directly towards me, as if by instinct; for I was perfectly, breathlessly still; and paused immediately opposite to where I was partially hidden, under the shadow of the wall. He seemed to feel that some one was there, and his glazed eyes were directed full upon me, looking now more ghastly than ever as they glistened in the light of the moon, which just then had passed from behind a cloud. Unable to restrain myself, I uttered his name.

'Good God! Mr Randall, is it you?' he exclaimed, with a start, recognizing my voice. 'We thought you were drowned!'

‘It is, Stephen,’ I replied, coming forward. ‘Tell me, for Mercy’s sake, are Esther and the child well?’

‘They are.’

‘Are they here?’

‘In that room, Mr Randall,’ he said, pointing to the one at which I had been listening.

‘Thank God!’

‘They are much changed, Mr Randall, since you—since you went away,’ he continued, in a sorrowful tone.

‘Do they ever speak of me in your hearing, Stephen, when you are about the house?’

‘Never, now, Mr Randall.’

There was something in the tone of Stephen’s voice that weighed upon my heart. He always was a kind old fellow, with a degree of refinement above his class; but now, his voice was weak, and sad, and tremulous; more so than what he told me seemed to demand. I conjured him to tell me all. With considerable hesitation and emotion, he complied.

‘None of us in the office thought you guilty of the forgery, sir, not one; and the principal clerks presented a note of sympathy and condolence to your good lady. Mr Picard became, as he is now, more harsh and disagreeable than ever; and, at one time, we thought Mrs Randall would leave the place; but Mr Dobell, we fancy, persuaded her to stay. She was always, you know, sir, of a very serious turn, and she now went more frequently to chapel than ever. She took on a great deal, we fancy, at first; but she is a lady, sir, of great spirit and firmness, and she concealed her feelings very well, and held herself up as proudly as the best of them.’

‘And poor little Margaret, did she miss me much?’

‘Indeed, sir, she did at first. Poor little dear, I often heard her crying after you in the morning; and, for many weeks, not even the fear of Mr Picard could keep her from going down in the day-time to the gateway and standing there looking up and down the lane, until she was fetched gently back by me. God forgive me for the many falsehoods I told her, sir, about your coming back! But I could not bear to see her crying about the great lonely house. And she always asked after you in such a loving, innocent, sorrowful way.’

Poor old Stephen’s narrative was here stopped by tears; as for me, I sobbed like a child.

‘Many of the gentlemen, sir, would gladly have taken her to their own homes; but your good lady would not part with her. I used

often to go up to her little room at the top of the house and play with her as I had seen you do, sir, in the middle of the day. She was always very glad to see me; and sometimes she would take me to the window when the noonday chimes of our old church were playing, and pointing up the sky above the tower, would fancy she saw you there. By degrees her inquiries after you became less frequent; and when the intelligence of the wreck of your ship arrived, and your good lady put her into mourning, supposing you dead, she had ceased to ask about you.'

'Has she grown much?'

'Very much, sir. She is a dear, sweet, gentle thing: we all respect your good lady, but we love little Margaret; and although I lost my sight entirely four years ago, and am now stone blind, I know her height to a hair, for there is not a night that she does not kiss me before she goes to bed, and I have had to stoop less for the kiss every week all that time.'

'Has young Mr Picard ever been heard of?'

'Oh yes, sir. We believe he was found murdered in some low house in a remote part of the town; but Mr Picard senior hushed the matter up, so that we never clearly knew the facts.'

'I thought he would never have allowed me to suffer for him,' I returned, 'if he had been on this side of the grave.'

'No, that he would not,' replied Stephen.'

I felt from Stephen's manner that there was yet some disclosure which his nerve was scarcely equal to make. Painful or not, I again conjured him to tell me all. After much entreaty I learned from him the dreadful truth that my wife had married again. It was many minutes before I recovered from the shock. My lost home stood before me, and I was an outcast wanderer on the wide earth.

'They have been married about a twelvemonth,' continued Stephen, 'and although I can only feel what kind of a man he is, I don't think they are happy.'

'Is he kind to the child?' I inquired, almost sternly.

'I don't think he is positively unkind; but he is very strict. He was a member of the chapel that your good lady used to go to, and he tries to mould little Margaret after his own heart. I fear they are not happy. Your good lady is less reserved before me as I am blind, and I feel sometimes that when she is reading, she is thinking of you.'

'Stephen,' I replied, sadly and firmly, 'I have only one more request to make of you before I leave the country again for ever.'

Keep my secret, and let me for one minute see Esther and the child.'

'I will,' returned Stephen, weeping bitterly, 'that I will; and may Heaven sustain you in your trouble.'

He threw the old wooden shutter back, which was not fastened on the inside, and exposed the long, deep, narrow recess, closed in at the end with red curtains glowing with the fire and light within.

'I will now go into the room,' he said, 'and deliver my keys; and while there, I will contrive to hook back the curtain.'

I thanked him with a silent pressure of the hand, and he went. Just then the deep church bell struck nine, and every stroke sounded like a knell upon my beating heart. I watched—oh, how intensely I watched!—grasping the window-sill with my hands. At length the curtain was drawn back, and the vision of my lost home stood before me. They were engaged in evening prayer. My child—my dear lost child—now grown tall and graceful, was kneeling at a chair: her long golden hair falling in clusters over her slender, folded hands. Esther was also kneeling with her face towards me. It looked more aged and careworn than I expected to see it, but it was still the old pale, statue-like face that I had cherished in my dreams, and that had nestled on my shoulder in the days gone by.

He who now stood in my place as the guardian of my lost home was kneeling where I could not see his face; but I heard his voice faintly muttering the words of prayer. Did any one in all that supplicating group think of the poor, wrecked, convict outcast? God alone knows. The curtain closed, and shut out my Lost Home from my dimmed sight for evermore.

THE END OF FORDYCE, BROTHERS.



So long as I can remember, I have always loved the City—taking a strange delight in wandering up and down its busy streets, elbowing its merchants in their favourite gathering places, and listening to the marvellous histories of many of its greatest money-makers. I like these men, perhaps, because I am not of them. I am of that listless, aimless, dreamy nature, which could not make money if it tried. The most promising enterprise would wither under my touch. Few are the guineas in my pocket that I can call my own, but I am well content, and no feeling

of envy arises in my mind as I listen to the musical clinking of coin that comes from the open doors of the rich banking-houses.

My most frequent haunt is an old nook in the heart of the City, which, although now thrown open as a public thoroughfare, must have been, in former times, the private garden of some wealthy merchant's mansion. The entrance is under a low archway, built with bricks of the deepest purple red, and over the archway, in a white niche, stands a short, weather-beaten figure of a man, cut in stone, in a costume of a former age. Passing over the well-worn pavement through the arch, you find yourself in a small quadrangle containing that rarest of all things in these modern days—a city garden. Small care does it now receive, because no one can claim it as his own. The ground is black and hard—the yellow gravel having long since been trodden out—and the chief vegetation which it boasts are two large chestnut-trees, that seem to gain in breadth and vigour as the years roll on. A few drooping flowers in one corner, show that some town-bred hand is near, fond of the children of the country, though little versed in their nature and their ways. Under the shade of one of the trees stands an old wooden seat, chipped in many places, and rudely carved with names and dates. Sitting on this bench, and looking before you to the other side of the quadrangle, the eye rests upon a short passage running under wooden arches, like an aisle in the old Flemish Exchange of Sir Thomas Gresham. On the face of the brickwork dwelling surmounting these arches (now turned into offices) is fixed a rain-washed sun-dial, and over this is a small weather-cock turret that at one time contained a bell.

Any time between twelve o'clock and four I may be found seated upon that old bench under the tree. Sometimes I bring a book, and read; sometimes I sit in listless repose, repeopling the place with quaintly-dressed shadows of the old stout-hearted merchants of the past. I seldom have more than one companion. Under the archway, and along the passage, busy men pass to and from their work the whole day long, but they are too much occupied, or too anxious, to give a moment's glance at the garden, or to linger by the way. My only fellow-visitor is an old clerk, whose years must have numbered nearly ninety, but whose memory is clear and strong, although his body is bent with age. He is a kind of pensioner connected with the place, and is the owner of the few faded flowers in the corner of the ground, which he tends with his own hands. For eighty long, weary years he has lived in these old buildings, never having been out of the City further than Newington fields. Here he was born, and here,

when the appointed time shall come, within sound of the familiar bells, and the familiar footsteps of the money-makers tramping over his head, he will drop into a City grave.

From the day when I ventured to give him some advice about the management of a lilac bush, apparently in a dying state, he came and sat by my side, pouring into my willing ear all the stories that he knew about the old houses that surrounded us. He soon found in me a sympathetic listener, who never interrupted or wearied of his narratives—the stores of a memory which extends over more than three-fourths of a century of time.

At one corner of the quadrangle is a part of the building with several long, dark, narrow, dusty windows, closely shut up with heavy oaken shutters, scarcely visible through the dirt upon the glass. None of the panes are broken, like those of a house in chancery, but its general gloomy, ruined appearance would assuredly have given it up as a prey to destruction, if it had not been in its present secluded position. Its dismal aspect excited my interest, and I obtained from my companion his version of its story.

I give it in his own person, though not exactly in his own words.

About the middle of the last century, two brothers were in business in these houses as general merchants, whose names were James and Robert Fordyce. They were quiet, middle-aged, amiable gentlemen, tolerably rich, honourable in their dealings, affable and benevolent to their servants, as I found during the few years that I was in their employment. Their transactions were large, and their correspondents very numerous; but, although they must have been constantly receiving information, by letter and otherwise, that would have been valuable to them in speculations on the stock-market, they never, to the best of my knowledge, made use of it for that purpose, but confined their attention strictly to their trade. This building was not divided then as you see it now. In that corner which is closed up were our counting-houses, the private room of the two brothers being on the ground-floor. The rest of the square was used as warehouses, except the side over the arches, and that was set apart as the private residence of the partners, who lived there together, one being a bachelor, and the other a widower without children. I was quite a young man at this time, but I remember everything as distinctly as if it was only yesterday that I am speaking about, instead of seventy years ago. I have, perhaps, a strong reason for my sharpened memory—I consider myself the innocent cause of the destruction of the firm of Fordyce, Brothers, through an accident resulting from my care-

lessness. One afternoon I went to the Post-office with a letter directed to a firm in Antwerp with whom we had large dealings. I dropped it on the way. It contained a bank draft for a large amount, and, although every search was made for it that afternoon and evening, it was without success. The next morning, about eleven o'clock, it was brought to our counting-house by a rather short young man of singular though pleasing aspect, named Michael Armstrong. He had a long interview with the elder partner, Mr James Fordyce, in the private room, and what transpired we never exactly knew; but the result was, that from that hour Michael Armstrong took his seat in our office as the junior clerk.

I had many opportunities of observing our new companion, and I used them to the best of my ability. His appearance was much in his favour, and he had a considerable power of making himself agreeable when he thought proper to use it. It was impossible to judge of his age. He might have been fifteen—he might have been thirty. His face, at times, looked old and careworn, at others, smiling and young, but there was sometimes a vacant calculating, insincere expression in his eye that was not pleasant. He made no friends in the place—none sought him, none did he seek—and I do not think he was liked enough by any of the clerks to be made the subject of those little pleasantries that are usually indulged in at every office. They had probably detected his ability and ambition, and they already feared him.

I thought at one time I was prejudiced against him, because I had been the chance instrument of bringing him to the place, and because his presence constantly reminded me of a gross act of carelessness that had brought down upon me the only rebuke I ever received from my employers. But I found out too well afterwards, that my estimate of his character was correct—more correct than that of my fellow-clerks, many of whom were superior to me in education and position, though not in discernment.

My constant occupation—when I was not actively employed in the duties of the office—was watching Michael Armstrong; and I soon convinced myself, that everything he did was the result of deep, quick, keen, and selfish calculation. I felt that the bringing back of the letter was not the result of any impulse of honesty, but of a conviction that it was safer and more profitable to do so, coupled with a determination to make the most of his seeming virtue. What the elder Mr Fordyce gave him, I never knew; but I judge from his liberal character that it was something considerable; and I know that when

Michael Armstrong took his place in our counting-house, he was only doing that which he had willed to do from the first moment that he had opened the lost letter, and ascertained the firm from whom it was sent. There was, at times, something fearfully, awfully fascinating in watching the silent, steady working of a will like his, and to see it breaking down in its progress every barrier opposed against it, whether erected by God or man; others saw it, and watched it, like me, and were equally dazzled and paralyzed.

Michael Armstrong affected to be somewhat deaf—I said affected, for I have good reason to believe that the infirmity was put on to aid him in developing his many schemes. During the greater part of the day he acted as private secretary of the two brothers, sitting in one corner of their large room, by that window on the ground-floor to the left, which is now closed up, like all the others in that portion of the building.

I have said before that the firm were often in the receipt of early and valuable intelligence, which they used for the legitimate purposes of their trade, but never for speculations in the stock-market. A good deal of our business lay in corn and sugar, and the information that the brothers got, enabled them to make large purchases and sales with greater advantage. Sometimes special messengers came with letters, sometimes pigeon expresses, as was the custom in those days. Whatever words dropped from the partners' table—(and they dropped with less reserve, as there was only a half-deaf secretary in the room)—were drunk in by that sharp, calm, smiling, deceitful face at the window. But, perhaps, his greatest opportunity was during the opening of the morning letters—many of them valuable, as coming from important correspondents abroad. Michael Armstrong's duty was to receive the key of the strong-room from the partners, when they came to business in the morning, and to prepare the books for the clerks in the outer offices. This strong-room was just at the back of Mr James Fordyce's chair, and as he opened the most important correspondence, reading it to his brother, who rested on the corner of the table, there must have been a sharp eye and a sharper ear watching through the crevices of the iron door behind them. The next duty that fell to Michael Armstrong, after the letters were read and sorted, was, to take any drafts that might be in them to the bankers, and bring back the cash-box, which was always deposited there for safety over-night. This journey gave him an opportunity of acting upon the information that he had gathered, and he lost no time in doing so. Of course, we never knew exactly what he did, or how he

did it; but we guessed that through some agent, with the money that Mr James Fordyce had given him when he brought back the letter, he made purchases and sales in the stock-market, with more or less success. He never altered in his manner or appearance; never betrayed, by word or signs to any of the clerks, his losses or his gains; and never neglected his mechanical duties, although he must have been much troubled in mind at times, by the operations he was conducting secretly out of doors.

Although not a favourite with the clerks, he became a favourite with the partners. There was no undue partiality exhibited towards him, for they were too scrupulously just for that—but his remarkable business aptitude, his care and industry, his manners, and probably his supposed infirmity, brought immediately before them every hour in the day by his position as private secretary, had a natural influence, and met with adequate reward.

In this way five years passed, quietly enough, to all outward appearance; but Michael Armstrong was working actively and desperately beneath the surface, and biding his time.

In those upper rooms to the right, exactly facing our counting-houses, lived an old clerk, named Barnard, with one child, a daughter, named Esther. The place was a refuge provided for an old and faithful, poor, and nearly worn-out servant of the house; and the salary he received was more like a pension, for his presence was never required in the office, except when he chose to render it. The daughter superintended the home of the two brothers, who, as I have said before, lived upon the premises in those rooms over the arches.

Esther Barnard, at this time, was not more than twenty years of age; rather short in figure; very pretty and interesting, with large, dark, thoughtful eyes. Her manners were quiet and timid, the natural result of a life spent chiefly within these red-bricked walls, in attendance upon an infirm father, and two old merchants. She went out very seldom, except on Sundays and Wednesday evenings, and then only to that old city church just beyond the gateway, whose bells are ringing even now. In the summer-time, after business hours, she used to bring her work and sit upon this bench, under this tree; and in winter her favourite place, while her father was dozing over the fire in a deep leathern chair, was in the dark recesses of that long window, in the corner of their sitting-room, overlooking the garden. She was very modest and retiring, never appearing more than was absolutely necessary during the day; but for all her care, many a

busy pen was stopped in the office as her small, light form flitted rapidly under the arched passage; and many an old heart sighed in remembrance of its bygone youthful days, while many a young heart throbbed with something more of hope and love.

The one who saw her most was Michael Armstrong. His duty, every night, was to lock up the warerooms and counting-houses, rendering the keys to old Barnard, who placed them in the private apartments of the two brothers. Since the old clerk's bodily weakness had increased, this task was confided to his daughter, who executed it timidly at first, gaining courage, however, by degrees, until, at last, she came to consider it a part of the day's labour, even pleasant to look forward to. Whether Michael Armstrong ever really loved Esther Barnard is more than I can say. I have to judge him heavily enough in other and greater matters, and I am, therefore, loth to suspect him in this. He had no faith, no hope, no heart—nothing but brain, brain, ceaseless brain; and small love, that I have found, ever came from a soul like this. What he thought and meant was always hidden behind the same calm, smiling mask—the same thoughtful, deceptive, even beautiful face. He used his appearance as only another instrument to aid him in his designs, and he seldom used it in vain. Esther's love for Michael Armstrong was soon no secret to the whole house, and many, while they envied him, sincerely pitied her, though they could scarcely give a reason for so doing. The partners, however—especially Mr James Fordyce—looked with favour upon the match; but, from some cause, her father, old Barnard, felt towards it a strange repugnance. It may have been that there was some selfish feeling at the bottom of his opposition—some natural and pardonable disinclination to agree to an union, that threatened to deprive him in his sickness and his old age of an only daughter who was both his companion and his nurse. Be this as it may, he would not fix any definite time for the marriage, although, for his daughter's sake, he did not prohibit the visits of him upon whom her heart was bestowed. Michael Armstrong did not press just then for a more favourable determination, and, for this reason, I am led to believe that he had obtained his object—an excuse for being upon the premises unsuspected after the business hours of the day were over. I never knew him to allow his will to be opposed, and I must, therefore, conclude, that in this instance he was satisfied with the ground that had been gained. Esther, too, was happy—happy in her confidence and pure affection—happy in the presence of him she loved—happy in being powerless to penetrate behind the stony,

cruel, selfish mask, that, in her trusting eyes, seemed always lighted up with love and truth.

In this way, the daily life went on for several months. Michael Armstrong, by care—unceasing care—perseverance, and talent, rose, day by day, in the respect and estimation of the partners. Much was entrusted to him; and although he was not visibly promoted over the heads of his seniors, he was still the confidential clerk; and the one in whom was centred the management of the banking and financial transactions of the house. We presumed—for we knew nothing then—that he was still working stealthily on the information that he gathered in the partners' room; and which his new position, more than ever, gave him opportunities of using. It was a busy time for speculation about this period. Fortunes were made and lost by stock-gambling in a day; and Michael Armstrong with his active, calculating brain, was not the man to allow the tempting stream to rush by without plunging into it.

Our firm had an important branch house at Liverpool, through which it conducted its shipping-trade with America. Every six months it was the custom of one of the partners—either Mr James or Mr Robert—to go down and pay a visit of inspection to this house, a task that usually occupied ten or twelve days. Mr James Fordyce, about this time, took his departure one morning for Liverpool, leaving his brother Robert in charge of the London affairs. I can see them even now, shaking hands, outside that old gateway, before Mr James stepped into the family coach in which the brothers always posted the journey. Michael Armstrong was gliding to and fro with certain required papers—unobtrusive, but keen and watchful. As the coach rolled away up the narrow street, Mr James looked out of the window just as his brother had turned slowly back under the archway. It was the last he ever saw of him, alive.

For several days after Mr James Fordyce's departure, everything went on as before. He started on a Friday, with a view of breaking the long, tedious journey by spending the Sunday with some friends in Staffordshire. On the following Wednesday, towards the close of the day, a pigeon-express arrived from Liverpool, bearing a communication in his handwriting, which was taken in to Mr Robert Fordyce in the private room. No one in the office—except, doubtless, Michael Armstrong—knew for many days what that short letter contained; but we knew too well what another short letter conveyed, which was placed in melancholy haste and silence the next morning under the pigeon's wing, and started back to Liverpool. This was Michael Armstrong's handwriting.

Mr James Fordyce, upon his arrival at Liverpool, had found their manager committed to large purchases in American produce without the knowledge of his principals, in the face of a market that had rapidly and extensively fallen. This gentleman's anxiety to benefit his employers was greater than his prudence; and, while finding that he had made a fearful error, he had not the courage to communicate it to London, although every hour rendered the position more ruinous. Mr James Fordyce, after a short and anxious investigation, sent a despatch to his brother, for a sum of many thousands of pounds,—an amount as great as the house could command upon so sudden an emergency. This money was to be forwarded by special messenger, without an hour's delay, in a Bank of England draft: nothing less would serve to extricate the local branch from its pressing difficulty, and save the firm from heavier loss. The letter arrived on the Wednesday, after the bank had closed, and when nothing could be done until the following morning. In the mean time, in all probability, Michael Armstrong received instructions to prepare a statement of the available resources of the firm.

That evening, about half-past eight o'clock, when Esther Barnard returned from church, she found Michael Armstrong waiting for her at the gateway. He seemed more thoughtful and absent than usual; and his face, seen by the flickering light of the street oil-lamp (it was an October night), had the old, pale, anxious expression that I have before alluded to. Esther thought he was ill; but in reply to her gentle inquiries, as they entered the house together, he said he was merely tired with the extra labour he had undergone, consequent upon the receipt of the intelligence from Mr James Fordyce, and his natural solicitude for the welfare of the firm.

Mr Robert Fordyce's habits—as, indeed, the habits of both the brothers—were very simple. He walked for two hours during the evening, from six o'clock to eight, and then read until nine, at which time he took a light supper, consisting of a small roll and a glass of milk; which was always brought to him by Esther, who left the little tray upon the table by the side of his book, and wished him good-night until the morning. She then returned to Michael Armstrong, on the nights he visited her, to sit until the clock of the neighbouring church struck ten, at which hour she let him out at the gate, and retired to rest.

On the night in question she had placed the same simple supper ready upon her table; and, after retiring for a few moments to her room, to leave her hat and cloak, she returned, and took the tray to Mr Robert's apartments. She did not notice Michael Armstrong

particularly before she went; but, when she came back, she found him standing by the open doorway, looking wildly and restlessly into the passage. She again asked him anxiously if he was ill, and his answer was as before; adding, that he thought he had heard her father's voice, calling her name, but he had been mistaken.

They sat for some little time together over the fire. Michael Armstrong would not take any supper, although pressed by Esther to do so. His mind was occupied with some hidden thought, and he appeared as if engaged in listening for some expected sound. In this way passed about half an hour, when Esther thought she heard some distant groans, accompanied by a noise, like that produced by a heavy body falling on the ground. Esther started up; and Michael Armstrong, who had heard the noise too, immediately suggested the probable illness of her father. Esther waited not for another word, but ran to his apartment, to find him sleeping calmly in his bed. On her return, a few minutes afterwards, to the room she had just left, she found Michael Armstrong entering the doorway with the light. He said he had been along the passages to make a search, but without finding anything. He appeared more composed, and advised her to dismiss the matter from her mind. They sat together more cheerfully for the next half-hour, until the ten o'clock bell sounded from the neighbouring church, when she went with him across the garden to the gate. The customary kiss was given at the door, and the customary laugh and good-night received from the old private watchman parading the street; but Esther Barnard, as she locked the wicket, and walked across the garden again to her own room, felt a heavy-hearted foreboding of some great sorrow that was about to fall upon her. Her prayers that night were longer than usual, and her eyes were red with weeping before she went to sleep.

Meantime, the lamp in Mr Robert Fordyce's apartment (the second window from the sun-dial) burnt dimly through the night, and died out about the break of day. Its master had died some hours before.

In the morning the porters opened the place at the usual hour, and the full tide of business again set in. One of the earliest, but not the earliest, to arrive was Michael Armstrong. His first inquiry was for Mr Robert Fordyce, who was generally in his private room to open the letters, and give out the keys. He had not been seen. An hour passed, and then the inquiry was extended to the dwelling-house. Michael Armstrong saw Esther, and begged her to go and knock at Mr Robert's door. She went, slowly and fearfully, knocked, and

there was no answer. Knocked again with the same result. The alarm now spread, that something serious had happened. Esther retired tremblingly with her forebodings of the night more than half realized, while the clerks came up, and, after a brief consultation, broke open the door.

A room with a close and slightly chemical smell; the blinds still down; an oil-lamp that had burnt out; a book half open upon the table; a nearly empty tumbler that contained milk; a roll untouched; and Mr Robert Fordyce, lying dead, doubled up on the floor near a couch, the damask covering of which he had torn and bitten. On the table, near the tumbler, was a small, screwed-up paper, containing some of the poison from which he had died; and near to this was a letter directed somewhat tremblingly, in his own handwriting, to his brother, Mr James.

One of the earliest, but not the earliest, in the room was Michael Armstrong, calm, dignified, and collected. Though far younger than many others, he took the lead naturally and firmly, and no one seemed to have nerve or inclination to dispute his authority. Esther stood anxiously amongst the crowd at the door looking on with her whole soul staring through her eyes.

Michael Armstrong took up the letter upon the table. It was unsealed. He opened it, and read in a clear, firm voice, the short and painful statement it contained. Mr Robert Fordyce confessed to his brother that for some time he had largely appropriated the funds of the firm to his own use for speculations that had turned out unsuccessful in the stock-market. Unable to refund the money to meet the sudden emergency that had fallen upon the house, and fearing to see his brother again after perpetrating such a wrong, he had resolved to die by poison, administered by his own hand.

Deep silence, broken by sobs and tears, followed the reading of this letter, for the dead merchant was loved and respected by all. A short summons, written by Michael Armstrong, as I have said before, was tied to the pigeon, and sent to Mr James Fordyce at Liverpool.

For the next few days, the business of the house was almost at a standstill. The sad event was the gossip of the Exchange, and the commercial coffee-rooms; and the credit of Fordyce, Brothers, high as their character stood in the City, was, of course, materially and fatally injured by this sudden calamity.

It was late on the Friday night when Mr James Fordyce returned, having started at once upon the receipt of the despatch, and posted

the whole way. He spent an hour in silent and sacred communion with his dead brother, and every one read in his fine, open, benevolent face how thoroughly the wrong was forgiven that had shaken the foundations of the firm, and sent one of its members to a sudden grave.

He then devoted himself, night and day, to an investigation of their financial position, aided in everything by Michael Armstrong, who was ever at his side. In the course of a few days his determination was known. By closing the branch concern at Liverpool, contracting the operations, and reducing the London house, the capital remaining was sufficient to discharge all outstanding obligations, leaving a small balance upon which to re-construct the firm. This was done, and the honour of Fordyce, Brothers, was preserved.

Many of our staff, under the new arrangements, were dismissed, but the thoughtful care of Mr Fordyce had provided them with other situations in neighbouring firms. In other respects our business went on as before, but with one remarkable exception. The confidence hitherto existing between Mr Fordyce and Michael Armstrong was at an end, and although the latter was still retained in his capacity as private secretary, he appeared to feel that he was no longer honoured and trusted. I believe at this time he would gladly have left the place, but some secret power and influence seemed to compel him to remain.

He had never made friends of any of his fellow-clerks, nor did he seek them now. Old Barnard's repugnance to his marriage with Esther at length took the form of open personal repugnance; and poor Esther, herself, while her heart was undoubtedly unchanged, became sometimes cold and timid in his presence: at others loving and repentant, as if struggling with some great, fearful doubt that she did not dare to confide to him. She was less desirous of seeking his company; and the roses on her fair young cheeks, that had grown up even within these old city walls, now faded away before the hidden grief of her heart. God bless her; her love had fallen, indeed, upon stony ground.

Mr Fordyce seemed also to be struggling between a variety of contending feelings. Whether he had set a watch upon Michael Armstrong at this period I cannot say; but while he appeared to feel his presence irksome, he seemed always anxious to have him near. Better would it have been for him if he had let him go his ways.

It was impossible for Michael Armstrong to be ignorant of this state of things, and it only served to make him, if possible, more keen-eyed and watchful. What he thought or did was still only known to himself, but there was occasional evidence upon the surface that seemed to indicate the direction of his silent working.

Our house had never entirely recovered the shock given to its credit by the violent death of Mr Robert Fordyce. Rumours of our being in an insolvent position were occasionally bandied about the town, gaining strength with the maturing of a large demand; dying away for a time, after it had been promptly satisfied. Our bankers, too, began to look coldly upon us.

The rumours gradually took a more consistent and connected form; an unfavourable condition of the money market arose; the strongest houses cannot always stand against such adverse influences, and we were, at last, compelled to close our transactions. We stopped payment.

Contrary to general expectation, Mr Fordyce declined to call in any professional assistance to prepare a statement of the affairs of the firm. At a preliminary meeting of his creditors, he took his ground upon his long and dearly-earned character for commercial integrity; and asked for a fortnight, in which to investigate his books and assets. He obtained it.

If any one was disappointed at this, it was Michael Armstrong. His will for once was foiled. For reasons best known, at that time, to himself, he wished, now that the house was destroyed, to have all books and papers removed out of the reach of Mr Fordyce. It was not to be.

Mr Fordyce, from the hour of the meeting, almost lived in his private office-room. Day after day was he seen arranging papers, and making extracts from the leather-bound ledgers. Night after night his green-shaded office-lamp was lighting him through the same heavy, weary task. He had removed his writing-desk from the back of the room to that window on the left of the ground-floor, where Michael Armstrong used to sit. He worked chiefly alone, and seldom called in the help of his secretary, except for some intricate parts of the cash accounts.

In this way the time went quickly on, and Mr Fordyce had arrived within a few days of the completion of his labours.

It was on a Wednesday evening—a winter's evening in the latter part of January—about half-past seven o'clock, that Mr Fordyce and Michael Armstrong were alone together, after all the clerks had gone

at the window in that room, deeply engaged in a mass of papers. There seemed to be an angry discussion between them. Mr Fordyce was pointing firmly to some white paper leaves, which shone brightly under the condensed glare of the shaded lamp. Both faces were covered with a dark veil of shadow, arising from the reflected covering of the lamp, but Michael Armstrong's keen eyes flashed evilly, even through the mist of that dim light. The next moment he was behind Mr Fordyce's chair, with his hand firmly twisted in the folds of the old merchant's neckcloth. There was a short and hopeless struggle. Two arms were thrown wildly into the air; a body fell off the chair on to the ground; and Mr James Fordyce had learnt more in that instant, than all those piles of paper would have taught him if he had examined them for years. He was dead;—dead, too, without any outward marks of violence upon his body.

Nor was this all.

Esther Barnard was sitting without a light in the dark recess of her favourite window;—sitting spell-bound, paralyzed, parched and speechless, gazing upon the old office window and the green-covered lamp, under the shade of which this terrible drama had just passed before her eyes. She could make no sign. The whole fearful past history of Michael Armstrong was made clear to her as in a mirror, although the picture was shattered in a moment, as soon as formed. She must have sat there the whole night through, heedless of the call of her sick father in the adjoining room, to nurse whom she had stayed away that evening from church. They found her in the morning in the same position, with her reason partially gone.

Michael Armstrong came in the next day, punctually at the business hour. He appeared even more collected than usual, for he believed that all evidence against him was now destroyed for ever. A rigid investigation was instituted on the part of the creditors; and the mind wanderings of poor Esther Barnard were of great importance in making out a case against him. It may be that her sad affliction was ordained to bring about his destruction, for I do not believe that if she had retained her reason, she would ever have been induced to speak one word against him. Her heart might have broken, but her tongue would have remained silent. As it was, her accusations were gathered together, bit by bit—gathered, as I gathered much of this story, from her lips in happy intervals, filling up from imagination and personal knowledge all that seemed unconnected and obscure.

The investigation never reached the courts of law. Michael

Armstrong saw with the old clearness of vision the inevitable result of the chain of evidence—saw it traced up from speculation to forgery, from forgery to his poisoning of Mr Robert Fordyce, from the poisoning to his forgery of the letter transferring the early crime, and from the letter to the destruction of the house and its last surviving representative. To avoid the expected punishment—prepared as he always was for every emergency—he poisoned himself in that private room, before our eyes. Whether the capital, of which he had sapped the firm, had been productive or not in his hands, we never knew. He was never known to acknowledge any kindred; and no one ever acknowledged him. He died, and made no sign; silently and sullenly, with his face turned to the wall.

At one time I indulged in the hope that Esther Barnard might recover, and I had prepared a home for her, even without the selfish desire of being rewarded with her poor, broken heart. Her father died, and I cherished her as a brother. Her melancholy madness, at times, was relieved with short lucid intervals, during which she thanked me so touchingly and sweetly for supposed kindnesses, that it was more than a reward. It was my pleasure to watch for such happy moments, patiently for days, and weeks, and months. In one of them she died, at last, in these arms, and I buried her in the ground of her old church outside the gateway. Our firm was never, in any form, restored, though I still cling to the old place. I have seen it sink gradually, step by step, until it can scarcely sink lower; but it is still near Esther. There is little happiness in growing so very old.

The old clerk told his story truthfully and clearly, and if there was any indistinctness of utterance about it, it was only towards the close. Much of it may have been the phantom of an old man's imagination, feeding on the tradition of a few closed, dusty shutters; but it interested me, because it spoke to me of a bygone time, and of persons and things among which I love to live and move.



FIRE AND LIFE.

IN TWO PARTS.

CHAPTER I.—THE 'JOLLY MINERS.'



N a remote corner of the 'Black Country,' not very accessible by railway, and certainly presenting no attractions for the ordinary fair-weather excursionist, lies the village, or mining settlement, of 'Three Ashes.' It nestles in the hollow of a valley under a perpetual cloud of smoke, and is not only black itself, but the cause of blackness in others. The noble hills which nearly encircle it are as grimy as the mouths of the tall chimneys which tower above the squat cottages in all directions, and their dark bare sides are studded here and there with the shafts of coal-mines, which look like gigantic spinning machines. What was once a glistening trout stream, breaking over moss-covered rocks and stones, is now an inky canal, dammed up with lock-gates, and covered with the scum and refuse of a dozen factories.

Travellers who catch a momentary and distant glimpse of 'Three Ashes,' as they are shot out of the mouth of the Highmoor Tunnel and into the mouth of the Deepdale Tunnel, on the Great East and West Junction Line, agree in describing it generally as a very unpicturesque place—a hideous excrescence in a lovely valley. Their view is a narrow one. There is a poetry of labour and action as well as of idleness and solitude, and the pictorial advantages of 'Three Ashes' shine most at night. When the neighbouring hills and dales are lost in gloom, the furnaces of 'Three Ashes' throw out their blood-red glare, or golden light, in the midst of which hundreds of sturdy men are seen beating the glowing iron, or wheeling fiery loads of refuse on to an ever-burning slope.

In busy times, when the iron-trade is thriving, the clatter of hammers and machinery seldom ceases in 'Three Ashes,' night or day, except on Saturdays. At six o'clock each Saturday evening, every manufacturing sound is hushed with military precision. The sudden silence seems almost painful to the inhabitants, and many complain that they can hardly sleep on those nights, 'for want of their usual lullaby.'

On one of these Saturday evenings—these brief intervals of rest in a week of hard labour—a somewhat larger company than usual were gathered in the single large room of the ‘Jolly Miners’ tavern—the one thriving ale-house of the village. Everything was very plain and dingy in ‘Three Ashes.’ The little church, just outside the village, looked like a small model of a gas-works, and the Methodist chapel in the chief narrow winding street might have been designed for an engine-house. There was a pottery in the neighbourhood, where very elegant cups and dishes were manufactured, but the arts of design that were cultivated there had no perceptible influence in ‘Three Ashes.’ The tavern, like most of the houses, was yellow and repulsive in appearance, with small windows, dirty red curtains, and sanded floors. It attracted its visitors, however, because it gave them a rude sort of society, and because there was no other place of meeting in the village.

On the evening in question, a large number of miners and iron-workers, with one or two of the shopkeepers in the village, were assembled for the transaction of a little business. The ‘Jolly Miners’ was an office as well as a tavern. The landlord was the local tax-collector. The ‘Three Ashes’ Mutual Sick Fund Society—the chief provident association in the village—was held there, and he was the treasurer.

The business of the evening was to receive the monthly subscriptions, and to present a testimonial to the founder of the fund—an old brakesman, named Joe Moss, who certainly looked incapable of originating anything except tobacco-smoke. The landlord of the ‘Jolly Miners,’ however, had persuaded him that he was the founder of the fund, and had also persuaded most of the members to buy him a drinking-mug, with a suitable inscription. Two of the body—Dick Padley, a strong, impulsive coal-miner, and a little puddler at one of the iron-works, known as ‘Bobby’—had been over to Clinktown, the great manufacturing centre of the coal and iron district, about fifteen miles off by road and rail, to purchase this mug. All the members had seen it, and had approved of it; and though it was tied up in a pocket-handkerchief, and supposed to be hidden by the landlord until it was wanted, Joe Moss had been allowed to satisfy his curiosity, and have a peep at it.

When the members had all met round the fire, they seemed to be much more embarrassed than usual, as if something was weighing heavily on their minds. At length one of them, addressing Dick Padley, opened the conversation:—

‘ Well, Dick, hast been to Clinktown, lad ? ’

‘ Ay,’ said Dick.

‘ What didst do at Clinktown ? ’

‘ Went to Meetin’ at Town Hall.’

‘ What didst see at Meetin’ ? ’

‘ Clinktoun member.’

‘ What wur Clinktoun member oop to ? ’

‘ Oop to nowt: I couldn’t make’t out more nor t’ man in t’ mune.’

This confused but characteristic account of a visit to the Clinktown Town Hall, where the Member of Parliament for that place was delivering his annual address to his constituents, hardly relieved the company from its embarrassment, and several nudged Dick Padley to begin the work of the evening.

‘ Hast gotten t’ mug, Dick ? ’ asked another of the iron-workers.

‘ Ay,’ returned Dick.

‘ Then give un mouth, lad,’ was the answer.

After this curious presentation and acknowledgment were over, an immense load appeared to have been taken off the minds of the company, and they ordered in pipes and ale, and talked with great freedom and loudness. The monthly subscriptions to the ‘ Sick Fund ’ were soon collected by the landlord, and the company, with one exception, settled down to be ‘ jolly.’ This exception was a collier named Tom Nutt, who was solitary in his habits, and who had the reputation of being very obstinate and long-headed. He could read and write better than most of the other men, and though not popular with them, for he was hardly a boon companion, he had a good deal of influence. He had refused to join the ‘ Jolly Miners’ Sick Fund ever since he had worked at ‘ Three Ashes ’—a period of four years, and he was always ready to give a reason for his refusal. In power of rough argument he was far above his fellow-workmen, and they generally refrained from ‘ tackling ’ him ; but on this occasion Dick Padley, who worked with him in the same vein in the same mine, being excited by the events of the evening, strove to draw him out a little.

‘ You won’t hold out much longer, Tom.’

‘ No,’ continued the little puddler, Bobby. ‘ You’ll join us when you’ve had the measles and whooping-cough.’

This joke caused a loud laugh at Tom’s expense.

‘ You know nowt about it,’ replied Tom. ‘ I’ll join when you’ve all had ’em all round, if there be any brass left.’

The landlord hardly liked this last remark, as it suggested the want of money to meet adverse contingencies, and he stood up for the soundness of the fund.

‘I say nowt agin it, do I?’ returned Tom, now thoroughly aroused. ‘The foond be good enough, as far as’t goes, but there’s not enough of yer.’

‘Why don’t yer join us, then?’ shouted several voices.

‘’Cos I can do better with my spare brass somewhere else. What be t’ good of fifty chaps, all livin’ in wun plaace, and wurkun at t’ same wark, cloobin’ together, when they can cloob wi’ thousans o’ gentry and oothers who bean’t so loikely to be knocked over? We doant ’ave mooch sickness in “Three Ashes,” but we ’ave a good mony deaths in t’ mines and wurks, and what use be foond then? I can make out loife assurance, but—’

‘Ah,’ interrupted the landlord, at this point, ‘ould Bradley, t’ draper chap, has talked thee over, Tom. You’ve gotten soom o’ his gimcracks—his foire and loife paapurs.’

‘An’ what harm?’ inquired Tom, indignantly. ‘When foire tuk plaace in Water-butt Lane, who was wuss off—old Collins, where foire begun, or Bill Stevens, where foire ended? Ould Collins had wun o’ them gimcracks, as you call ’em—them foire pol’cies, an’ he went to Bradley an’ got his money; but Bill Stevens ’ad to beg like a pauper.’

‘Ah, that be true—that be true,’ echoed several voices.

‘When ould Collins died,’ continued Tom in a louder tone, ‘thro’ wurkun in too much water, what kep’ his wife an’ young ’uns out o’ wurkus, but anoother o’ them “gimcracks”—a loife pol’cy? Sick foond wouldn’t a’ done ’em much good then, I reckon.’

‘That be true—that be true,’ again echoed several voices.

‘Ay,’ said the landlord, ‘but what did sick foond do for soom of thee ’ere when thou wurn’t oop to maun?’

‘It gave me foive shillun’ a-week when I broke moy leg,’ returned the little puddler.

‘What made thee break thoy leg?’ asked Tom, looking sharply towards him.

‘I toombléd doown.’

‘Thee toombléd doown,’ repeated Tom, sarcastically. ‘Thee ’rt awlus toomblin’ doown, and yel makes thee.’

‘Coom, coom,’ shouted the landlord, at this attack upon ale, ‘live, and let live, that be my maxum; eh, mates?’

‘He-ur, he-ur,’ responded a few voices.

‘I doan’t wunt to shut thee oop,’ said Tom, addressing the landlord, ‘but thou mustn’t try to shut oop oother volks. Thee and thy foond bean’t everything, an’ I mean to let old Bradley and his “gimcracks” ’ave a chance.’

CHAPTER II.

A FOOLISH MASTER.

 HIS was not the first time that Tom Nutt had stood up as the champion of things that were little understood or appreciated in ‘Three Ashes.’ Mr Bradley, the draper and grocer just alluded to, was looked upon for a long time as an interloper, because he was not a ‘Three Ashes’ man born and bred, like his predecessor in the business. This predecessor was always in a bankrupt-state—his goods were bad and dear, and he had to arrange with his creditors every three or four years, but still he was supported as a native, and the one draper and grocer of the place, and any opposition to him would have been resented as unfair dealing. His trading condition, however, became at last so unsound, that no practicable degree of propping could keep him standing, and Bradley—a Clinkertown man, with Clinkertown energy and notions—purchased what was called the ‘good-will’ of the shop. This good-will turned out to be little more than ill-will, but still Bradley persevered, set his face as much as possible against the credit system, and sold cheap goods for ready money. Tom Nutt was the first ‘Three Ashes’ man who attempted to turn the tide in his favour, though Tom was not without many strong prejudices. He would never admit that Bradley knew how a ‘Three Ashes’ woman ought to be dressed, or that his taste in silk handkerchiefs was worth a lump of coal. When Bradley added an agency for a fire and life office to his other business, and put up a brilliant picture in his shop, representing the chief buildings of his Life office, including the Clinkertown Branch, Tom Nutt was the first to inquire about a system which was practically unknown in ‘Three Ashes.’ The name of Insurance was familiar to a few of the inhabitants, but it suggested no idea except a vague notion that it was something good only for great coal-owners and iron-masters, which these capitalists had invented, and kept to themselves. Tom Nutt required much explanation before something like the same idea was expelled from his mind, and he found at least a score of objections

which Bradley had to answer. At last, however, Tom was converted.

Tom Nutt was a neighbour of Dick Padley's, and they both lived in a row of low cottages before alluded to, called Water-butt lane. The lane took its title from a butt which stood against the wall of the end cottage to supply the whole row with water. These cottages were not models of arrangement nor cheapness, for they belonged to a great coal-owner, named Darby, who employed the whole of the tenants, and was a determined foe to anything like improvement of workmen or workmen's dwellings. He was the sole proprietor of the Darby Works—the largest coal and iron works in the district—and he introduced nothing there to lighten labour or make life secure, that he was not compelled to introduce by the mining inspectors. He paid high wages, because 'Three Ashes' colliers and iron-workers could command them, but he paid them grudgingly. He had risen from 'the lowest round in the ladder,' chiefly by his thrift and industry, and a natural power of calculation which enabled him to work out nearly all his transactions 'in his head.' He had no book learning; and as he had got on very well without it, he thought others could do the same. He disapproved of night schools; he thought that the more a man is educated the worse workman he becomes; that coal-owners and employers generally should decline to assist the working classes in any way; that education and the confounded penny papers are the cause of strikes and all kinds of mischief; that public-houses are the proper places for working men to meet in; that the more you do for the working-classes, the more ungrateful they are; that if education was introduced into 'Three Ashes' there would soon be no colliers to be had; that the utmost a working-man should learn is how to read his Bible; that education would fill the men's heads with all kinds of nonsense, and that the best educated men would mislead the others. Such sentiments, held and acted upon by a large employer of labour, naturally kept down improvement of all kinds in 'Three Ashes.' It checked wholesome providence in the men and their families, and encouraged pot-house combinations like the 'Jolly miners' Sick Club. If it did not wholly discourage Tom Nutt, and the very few men of his stamp, it threw great difficulties in their way when they attempted to spread their views. Tom was always urging Dick to insure his life for the sake of his family, which was a large one, and in this he was seconded by Sarah Padley, Dick's wife, a sensible careful woman, a little superior to the average of her class.

'Nay, lad, it be all very well for thee to talk loike that,' said

Dick, 'when thou'st on'y got two kids; but what be I to do wi' four? I be too poor.'

'Thee fling'st away more at "Jolly Miners," ev'ry week,' returned Tom, 'than would insure thee for two hundred pund at thoy age.'

Sarah Padley nodded assent at this.

'Yow loike a drap o' beur, too,' said Dick, chuckling, 'now and then.'

'I bean't an hangel,' replied Tom.

'It ud never be ony use to me whoile I lived,' continued Dick, a selfish thought having just struck him.

'Nay, thou'rt wrong, lad,' replied Tom, 'thee could awlus get a pund or two on t' pol'cy, if thee wanted it.'

'I doan't think Muster Darby thinks much on it, that's another thing,' remarked Dick, 'an he know more than we do.'

'He knows nowt,' returned Tom contemptuously, 'he be too fond o' work'us for workun men when they can't wurk, to care for loife assurance. I'll tackle 'im to-morrow.'

The next day, during the dinner-hour at the colliery, Tom was as good as his word. He was a very sturdy independent workman, who knew his own market value; he always took his wages as a right, not as a favour, and was never afraid to speak his mind to his master. Mr Darby, on the other hand, knew Tom's worth, and much as he disliked forward intelligent workmen, he tolerated Tom.

Tom could hardly have sought an interview at a more unfavourable time, for Mr Darby had had some most troublesome business to transact that morning. He had been called upon to sign his name. There was nothing which he hated, nothing which he avoided, more than this operation. His signature when finished was not a sightly nor a clear piece of penmanship, notwithstanding the efforts made to produce it. When he was compelled to sign a document, he shut himself up for at least half-an-hour in his private counting-house, and covered dozens of paper slips with experimental signatures. After he had at last attained that small degree of clearness which seemed to satisfy him, he ventured to sign the document, whatever it might be; the door was then thrown open, and he was discovered ankle-deep in manuscript litter, wiping his perspiring forehead. This was the position in which Tom found him.

'Now, then,' he said hastily, 'what be t' matter wi' thee?'

'Nowt,' returned Tom.

'Thee wunts summat?'

‘Ay.’

‘Out wi’ it, then.’

‘I was born at “Three Ashes;” I loike “Three Ashes,” an’ I wunt to see summat doon for ut. You can do ut.’

‘You’ve got a choorch, a chapel, an’ a workus; what moore dost wunt?’

‘I doon’t wunt workus; there be too mooch workus;—it be workus when young, an’ workus when ould.’

‘You doan’t wunt me to keep all t’ paupers in “Three Ashes?”’ asked Mr Darby, getting very red in the face.

‘I doan’t wunt thee to do onything, except stan’ out o’ way. Wages be good in “Three Ashes,” an’ men be quoite able to tak’ care o’ theirselves.’

‘I see what thee beest droivin’ at,’ replied Mr Darby, ‘an’ it wunt do. Men be reet enough as they are. Ever since ould Bradley bit thee about that loife bus’ness, thou’st gone mad.’

‘Nay: I’ve not,’ returned Tom.

‘Thee wun’t men to ’ave buk-larnin’,’ said Mr Darby, ‘but I got on very well wi’out it.’ Mr Darby felt a slight twinge as he said this, and recollected his recent struggles with pen-and-ink. ‘When I wurked in moine, I wur never afeard o’ onythin’. I never bothered moy ’ead wi’ loife assurance, an’ whoy shud thee? Thee bean’t afeerd o’ thoy wurk, be thee? Thee bean’t a cur?’

Tom left the counting-house without trusting himself to say another word.

CHAPTER III.

SHARP LESSONS.



SEVERAL months passed after this unsatisfactory interview without Tom ever speaking to Mr Darby on any subject except work. He had not, however, forgotten the last remark of the great coal-owner, and he longed for some opportunity to prove that a careful man is not necessarily a coward. Unfortunately that opportunity soon came. One winter’s afternoon, when most of the men and boys were below, an alarm was raised that the Darby Main pit was on fire. The news soon spread through ‘Three Ashes,’ and anxious wives and mothers rushed from the low cottages on every side, and made their way over the black hillocks to

the mine. Mr Darby was amongst the first to arrive at the pit: he leaped into the cage at once, and descended the shaft. When he got to the bottom, he found most of the work-people pressing towards the cage. An explosion had occurred in one of the remote cuttings—the coal had caught fire—the air was hot and suffocating; and every moment they stayed threatened them with death.

‘Where be the foire?’ shouted Mr Darby.

‘In Joe Moss’s cutting,’ was the reply.

Mr Darby seized a safety lamp from one of the men. ‘Get thee up—get thee up’—he shouted, pointing to the basket, and groped into the mine. He had only got a few yards along the dark passage, when he met Tom Nutt carrying a helpless body in his arms—the black roof being too low to allow him to carry it on his shoulders. Mr Darby passed on.

‘Haud on—Haud on,’ roared Tom to the men, who were scrambling into the cage, and climbing up the ropes—‘here is Dick Padley nigh gone.’ The exhausted man was lifted into the cage.

‘Who’ll follow me into pit,’ roared Tom, ‘an’ try to stop the fire?’

There were only two or three feeble responses to this request.

‘I’ll not take you, Jack Hodges, nor you, Sam Moor—you’ve both large families; but I’ll take you, Tom Smith, because your life’s insured; and you, Hal Davis, because you’re single. Tumble down, lads, and up with the basket.’

The two men last named jumped out of the cage into the pit, and joined Tom Nutt, while the rest of the colliers and boys were dragged quickly out of danger. Tom Nutt ran into the mine, followed by his companions. They soon reached Mr Darby, who was standing at the mouth of a side passage leading into the cuttings where the fire was raging. He was anxious for the safety of his property, but hesitated what course to adopt. The passage was hotter than the mouth of an oven. Tom Nutt entered it for a few yards, and stumbled over a body. He carried it out into the main passage, and examined it by the light of his lamp. It was old Joe Moss, quite dead. Tom sent Hal Davis with the body to the bottom of the shaft, and then turned to Mr Darby.

‘There be on’y wun thing to do,’ said Tom Nutt.

‘What be it,—what be it?’ shouted Mr Darby.

‘Brick oop this passage and toother leadin’ to cuttin’, an’ choke foire.’

There was no time to be lost, as the fire was rapidly increasing,

and the air in the main passage was becoming hot and suffocating. Tom Nutt was now master for the time, and Mr Darby acted as one of his men. The bricks, tools, and mortar—of which a stock is always kept in every mine—were dragged to the required spot, and in less than half-an-hour the two side passages were bricked up firmly, and the mine was saved.

‘Thank God for that,’ said Mr Darby as they ascended in the basket; ‘if moine be reet, Tom, I’ll gie thee onythin’ thee loikes to ask, in reason.’

‘Wilt thee oonsay what thee said toother day aboot curs?’

‘I wool, Tom, I wool,’ answered Mr Darby.

‘I doan’t wunt ony more,’ said Tom.

As soon as Tom got to the mouth of the pit, he broke through the crowd who were pressing forward to shake his hands, and hurried off to Dick Padley’s cottage, where he heard Dick had gone after he had slowly recovered in the fresh air. He found him surrounded by his wife and children. Sarah Padley was dressing a bad burn on her husband’s left arm with oil and lint, and crying over her task.

‘I owe moy loife to thee, Tom,’ said Dick Padley.

‘Yow owe me nowt,’ returned Tom, ‘I shud a doon nowt if ut ’adn’t bin for ould Bradley.’

‘Ould Bradley?’

‘Ay. I knew moy woife an’ kids would be reet if I got killed in moine, so I didn’t care much what I did.’

‘I must do what thee asked me to do,’ remarked Dick in a tone of self-reproach, ‘I must get pol’cy—I must get un.’

‘I be sick o’ askin’ thee,’ replied Tom, ‘though it be for thoy good, an’ for the missus’s an’ young uns’ here. I’ve gotten bad news to tell thee.’

‘What be ut?’ asked Dick and his wife, anxiously.

‘Poor old Joe Moss be dead,’ replied Tom.

‘There be two young orphans, then, left badly off,’ said Sarah Padley, crying again.

‘Yow knaw what yow promised their mooother, lass,’ said Dick, ‘when you noorsed her on her death-bed? Goo an’ look after ’em, lass—look after ’em.’



PART II.

CHAPTER I.

HARD TIMES.



OUR years later, many changes had occurred in 'Three Ashes.' Tom Nutt had long been a butty, or foreman, at the Darby Works, and had made a few converts to his views of sound providence. Mr Darby, unfortunately, was not amongst the number. Mr Bradley, the draper and grocer, had not succeeded in driving out the tallymen, and he had fallen more into the credit system of business. Dick Padley, after the first impulse of gratitude to Tom, and the first impression of the sudden poverty his children had escaped had died away, did nothing more than get a few papers descriptive of life insurance from Mr Bradley. Sarah Padley, however, who, assisted by her two eldest children, earned a little money as a boot-closer, working for a large manufacturer in Clinkertown, had been more deeply impressed by her husband's narrow escape from death, and the helpless condition of Joe Moss's young orphans. She quietly insured her own life for a small sum within her means—one hundred pounds—and religiously saved a shilling or so of her own money every week to pay the premiums. Nothing gave her so much deep thankful happiness, as the sight of the little slip of paper—the life policy—well-thumbed, and blacked with coal-dust. She kept this paper in a little work-box,—a present from her husband before she was married,—along with her marriage certificate—her 'marriage lines,' as she called it. Her husband was kind, and they lived very happily together, but he had not sufficient self-denial to do as she did. She saved her money by pinching herself in dress, and sometimes in food, and she did it from a sense of duty to her children. Joe Moss's orphans—a boy and a girl, both very young,—were left with scarcely a shilling after the tallyman and the funeral expenses had been paid. The landlord of the 'Jolly Miners' made a great effort to collect a fund for them at his house, but he only gathered three pounds and fifteen shillings, part of which he could have claimed, if he had been so disposed, for an old ale and tobacco score of the dead man's. He gave the whole of the money, however, to Tom Nutt, for the children, by the desire

of Dick Padley and the rest of his regular customers. This money was soon exhausted. The boy then went to work in the mines, when he ought to have gone to school, and the girl was taught boot-closing by Sarah Padley, and was kept partly by her, and partly by several other neighbours.

About this time a sudden calamity fell upon 'Three Ashes.' The whole of the colliers struck for higher wages, and as it barely paid to bring coals from any distant collieries to the place, the railway being nearly four miles off, with bad levels in the roads, the iron-works were thrown into a state of idleness. As usual in all disputes between masters and men, the men were not altogether in the right, nor altogether in the wrong. In working the great Darby main and the adjoining pits, the bulk of the miners had suddenly come upon beds of coal which were far more difficult to work than those they had been engaged on for several years past. They found their earnings much decreased each week, while Mr Darby accused them of laziness. After about six weeks' experience of this kind, a meeting was held at the 'Jolly Miners,' and a deputation, of which Dick Padley was the spokesman, was sent to Mr Darby. Mr Darby was obstinate. He had been a workman himself—he prided himself upon being a practical man—and he had a theory. He believed that the hard coal was only a shallow vein intersecting the ordinary 'Three Ashes' bed—a 'fault' in mining, and he knew how difficult it was to lower wages after once raising them. He refused to listen to the men's complaints and propositions—talked about 'averages,' which neither he nor they clearly understood, and ended by offending them as much by his manner as his decision. He was a very good judge of coal, but a very bad judge of human nature. He thought the men were too ignorant to combine, and too improvident to hold out. There had not been a general strike in 'Three Ashes' for twenty years, and he thought he was safe. He was wrong, as he had often been before. Cajolery, fellow-feeling, and intimidation did their work rapidly, and in two days from this interview, there was not a man or boy on Mr Darby's or the adjacent works, whether digging hard or soft coal, who had not thrown down his tools.

Mr Darby took counsel with no one but Tom, and hardly with him. He prided himself upon being able to hold out as long as any man. He looked upon combination as a crime—although the law had long declared that it was not one—and resented it as he would a burglary. His foreman, Tom Nutt, was far from agreeing with him.

‘As long as men be men,’ said Tom, ‘they’ll houd on to each other, whether they be masters or labourers.’

‘Ah,’ returned Mr Darby, ‘these be your confounded insurance whims;—your notions o’ large cloobs.’

‘I doan’t foind masters aboove cloobin’ together, when it suits their purpose,’ said Tom. ‘Their mooney awlus mixes loike waater wi’ waater.’

‘There be soom buk-larnin’ agitators at bottom o’ this row, I’ll wager,’ retorted Mr Darby. ‘I wish I’d not listened to thee, when thee got me to start that noight-skule.’

‘I wish it ’ud bin started twenty year ago,’ rejoined Tom, ‘an’ then we moight ’ave had sensible folks to deal wi’. I be more afeerd o’ “Three Ashes” ign’rance, than I be o’ “Three Ashes” larnin’.’

CHAPTER II.

FOOLISH SERVANTS.



OM NUTT was right again, and Mr Darby was wrong: there was more to be feared from the ignorance than from the intelligence of the combination.

Three months soon passed by without the occurrence of any particular outrage, but ‘Three Ashes’ wore a very different appearance. The cloud of smoke which used to hang over the valley had disappeared, the air was clear, the sun shone on places it had seldom been able to shine on before, and wild flowers budded thickly on the hill-side. Nature seemed to be laughing at the folly and obstinacy of man. The streets were clean, the windows in the houses were clean, the clothes of the people were clean, but ragged. The silence during the day, throughout the place, was broken only by the rumble of the skittle-ball in the yard of the ‘Jolly Miners,’ or a dispute sometimes between the sulky idle groups who stood against the street corners, or leant over the canal bridge, looking listlessly into the water. The canal was no longer covered with scum, but it was no longer a highway for coal-barges. The fly-boats, travelling from one part of the country to another, delivered no casks nor trusses at the wharves, but glided past the place as if it was afflicted with the plague. The shutters at the few shops in the chief street were often not taken down at mid-day, and even Mr Bradley showed

less industry than formerly. His stock had dwindled to less than half its former amount, and his shelves were largely filled with hollow paper bundles. There was hunger, there was misery in many of the low-roofed cottages, but it showed itself less in the faces of the men, than in the faces of the women and children. The women and children often looked weak and sad—the men often looked gaunt, reckless, and savage. Few thought of moving from the place to distant collieries, none thought of emigrating, or pined after the means; most of them desired to carry their point against Mr Darby. There was one exception to this feeling. The little amateur ‘Three Ashes’ brass band, composed chiefly of youths, which had been organized by Tom Nutt, and had attained so much proficiency that it won a prize in one of the local contests with other moor bands, went over to Clinktown before the strike had lasted two months, and never came back again. It played about the streets of that city for several weeks, and then went across the country to other large towns. Several mothers who had thus lost their sons, accused Tom Nutt of having made the boys vagabonds. ‘Ah,’ said Tom, with a slight tone of self-reproach, ‘when a strike flies in at t’ door, music, and everything that be good, flies out of t’ winder.’

Tom, although he had removed to a house near the mouth of the Great Darby Main, frequently called at Dick Padley’s cottage, to cheer up the inmates, and give them a little assistance. One night about this time he called as usual, and found Sarah Padley alone, putting on her bonnet in a state of great excitement.

‘What’s t’ matter, lass?’ he asked, ‘what’s t’ matter?’

‘I was just coomin’ up to thee an’ thoine,’ she said. ‘Thou’st ’eard t’ news?’

‘Nay, lass; what news?’

‘“Jolly Moiners” be shut oop—landloord be roon away—bank-roopt, they say, an’ moonted police be gardin’ house from Dick an’ oothers who swore they’d pull ’un down.’

‘Where be Dick, now?’ asked Tom, aroused.

‘I fear he be oop to now good,’ she replied. ‘He went out aboot a hour since wi Black Sam, an’ soome o’ his lot towards ould Dowlas shaft.’

Tom Nutt left Sarah Padley at once, and walked sharply in the direction indicated. The old Dowlas shaft was a part of the Darby Works which had long been unused. It had been the scene of a terrible explosion many years before, in which more than fifty miners were killed. The pit had been flooded with water to put out the fire,

and as the workings were thought to be very nearly exhausted, this water was never pumped out. The engines were removed from the mouth of the mine. The old engine-house was half knocked down, and the wooden scaffolding was left to rot and fall to pieces. The night was dark and wintry, but Tom knew the ground well, and in ten minutes he was within sight of the old pit-head. He heard voices proceeding from the ruins of the engine-house, and he walked noiselessly on the grass which had grown here in rank luxuriance, until he had reached one of the walls of this building. Looking through a hole in the brickwork, he saw Dick Padley and about half-a-dozen miners, sitting on a few loose bricks round a glimmering guttering candle which was stuck in a lump of clay. No more appropriate place could have been chosen for such a meeting. Everything was suggestive of idleness and decay.

'Who be cause o' "Jolly Moiners" bein' broken oop,' said Black Sam, savagely, 'an' sick foond bein' roon away wi' by landloord? Whoy Muster Darby. It be his 'ouse, and he awlus found t' brass to carry it on.'

'That be true—that be true,' echoed several voices in hoarse whispers.

'Who caused moy child to die for wunt o' food? Why Muster Darby. I went to baker's an' asked for more credit—they wudn't gie it. Baker's be anoother o' Muster Darby's preshus 'ouses.'

Black Sam ground one of the old bricks to powder beneath his heel at this point, and several men murmured approval.

'I doan't care what thee says, Sam,' answered Dick, evidently replying to a former part of the conversation, 'I wunnut rob, I tell thee.'

'What's Muster Darby doon for thee, I shud loike to knaw?' asked Sam.

'I doan't care,' repeated Dick, doggedly, 'I wunnut rob, I tell thee. I'll burn his 'ouse down,—I'll mak' 'im as poor as we be, but I wunnut rob.'

Tom Nutt, who had listened to this conversation from his hiding-place, here leaped boldly through a ruined window-hole into the engine-house, and confronted the party. His unexpected entrance seemed to paralyze the miners, although they sprang upon their feet.

'Dick Padley,' said Tom, addressing the whole company through his friend, 'thou'rt talkin' loike a fool, an' fools mak' the worst o' rogues. Thee wun'st to burn Muster Darby's 'ouse doon—at least thee talk'st loike it.'

‘He’s not dun reet by us,’ said Dick, sullenly.

‘He’s not dun altogether reet by ony o’ thee, an’ thee know’st I think so,’ returned Tom, ‘but that’s no reason whoy thee shud’st hurt thoyself still foorthier. You may burn his ’ouse an’ goods, but that wunnut hurt ’im. Insoorance coompany will fit ’im oop agen, while you’ll go to prison.’

‘Insoorance coompany wunt gie me back moy choild, will ut?’ asked Black Sam.

‘I doan’t wunt to ’ave ony wurd wi’ thee, Sam Jones,’ said Tom. ‘Yow’r loike a good mony more—yow wunt to shuv thoy faults on other folks’ shulders. If you’d cum to me when thy choild wur ill, instead o’ hangin’ about pot-’ouse, you shud a’ had the last croost o’ bread I’d gotten in coopboard.’

Nutt was well known to be a firm and sensible friend of the men, while he did his duty to his master, and his words were not thrown away.

‘Go home, lads,’ he said, ‘go home, an’ let us all troy an’ forget this mad, foolish meetin’. A few days—a few hours, perhaps—may see us out o’ trouble.’

CHAPTER III.

THE LAST TEMPTATION.



R DARBY had been away from ‘Three Ashes’ for nearly a fortnight, travelling through the coal districts to see if labourers could be got to work in his pits at the old rates. While he was away, all his money business was managed by his lawyer, whose instructions were to collect all rents due in ‘Three Ashes’ with mechanical legal precision. The lawyer was a steady professional man, who obeyed his instructions literally. He took no legal notice of the strike, and would not listen legally to any stories of consequent poverty. Those tenants who could not pay their rent, were told that on a particular morning brokers’ men would be put in possession of their humble chattels. Dick Padley was one of these; and early on the day after he had slunk home from the meeting at the old Dowlas shaft, he found an unwelcome stranger sitting in his little cottage. The younger children asked who the stranger was, and were told by their mother that it was a friend from Clinktown; but they were hardly satisfied with this statement. They

peeped at him suspiciously through the cracks of the back-door, while their father leant against the front door-post, savagely smoking a pipe stuffed full of old rags. All Dick's evil passions were aroused again, and Tom's lesson of the night before had faded from his mind.

Sarah Padley knew her husband's disposition, and she dreaded some violent outbreak of temper. She tried to continue her boot-closing work, but with little success. Dick, after smoking for at least half-an-hour, suddenly threw his pipe down on the stones outside, smashing it to pieces, and strode into the cottage. Taking his cap off a nail, and glaring at the broker's man who was sitting in a corner, he said:—

'I've wurked 'ere, mon an' boy, for foive and twenty year, an' I wunnut be toorned out o' moy 'ouse for "a thousan" Muster Darbies.'

The broker's man was silent.

'I be goin' doon town, lass,' continued Dick, addressing his wife, 'to see what can be dun'. They wunnut toorn me out onless they tear me limb from limb. I warn 'em not to troy ut.'

Dick's words and manner naturally alarmed his wife, and she looked out of the window, vacantly and anxiously, thinking what she could do to remove this trouble from their home. A thought suddenly struck her. She remembered the life policy she had up-stairs in her work-box, and she decided to take it to Mr Bradley, and see if he could help her. In less than a quarter of an hour she was in Mr Bradley's shop, which smelt of tea, pepper, and fustian. Mr Bradley received her kindly, and told her that she was welcome, as she always had been, to any credit he could give her for groceries or other goods, but it was quite out of his power to lend her any money upon the policy. The bad times in 'Three Ashes' had drained him of all his cash, and his capital was now represented by stock and book-debts. He gave her a letter, however, to the branch office at Clinktown, where he had no doubt she would get what she wanted. She started off, weak and thinly clad as she was, to walk to the railway, and got to Clinktown about two o'clock. After a little delay in finding the office, and a little more delay in waiting to see the secretary, she was ushered into his room, and delivered Mr Bradley's letter. Her application was immediately attended to, and she went away happy with five pounds lent to her on the security of her policy—a sum more than she required to pay her rent.

It was quite dark when Sarah Padley left the little blinking railway-station, and hurried along the dark road to 'Three Ashes.' She

had taken no food all day, except a grimy bun which she had bought at Clinktown while waiting for the train; but joy at having got the money, fear that she might be robbed, or that she might not get home before Dick had committed some wild outrage in his excitement, gave her power to walk quickly. The night was stormy, the wind hissed through the tall, bare phantom elms at the road-side, heavy clouds rolled over each other before the face of the dull, greasy-looking moon, and the rain, which had fallen at intervals throughout the day, now came down in a cold, heavy, drifting shower. Sarah Padley stayed for no shelter, but putting her thin shawl over her head, and holding her treasure—her five sovereigns screwed up in paper—tightly in her hand, she hurried on. After she had followed the main valley road for about a mile, she left it to take a by-path across the higher moorland—the shortest way to her cottage, which stood a little distance out of ‘Three Ashes.’ This pathway led past the old Dowlas shaft, and several other old neglected workings on the Darby Estate, which Sarah Padley knew very little about. Her work kept her at home during the week, and her Sunday walks were not taken in this direction. The rain was driven in her face until it nearly blinded her, but still she almost ran across the moor, without looking to the right or left. Suddenly her feet slipped from under her, and her dress caught in something which pulled her back. She was a miner’s wife, and she knew her position. She was hanging helplessly over an old pit—a ventilating shaft of the Old Dowlas Works—and nothing but a rotten garment which had caught in some of the old wood-work left at the mouth of the pit, kept her from falling a hundred feet into the black water which half filled the mine. She was afraid to struggle. Still grasping the precious paper in her right hand, she thought of her husband and children whom she was trying to help, and, like a true wife and mother, she thought of the money which her death would bring them. The love of life, however, was strong within her, and she shrieked out something like a prayer, calling upon God to help one who had always tried to help herself. Her voice was heard. A strong arm lifted her out of the pit; the clouds rolled away from the watery moon, and she stood face to face with—her husband.

Dick Padley trembled from head to foot.

‘Sarah, lass,’ he said, in a broken voice, ‘thou’st not—thou’st not troied to kill thoyself?’

‘Noa, Dick,’ she returned, giving him the money, ‘I’ve troied to save thee. What brought thee here?’

At this moment the pattering of a horse's hoofs was heard. Dick took his wife's arm and guided her into the old ruined engine-house, where the meeting of discontented miners had taken place the night before. Mr Darby passed by on horseback, followed at some distance by an old servant, also on horseback, who carried his luggage. Dick shuddered.

'Coom away, lass,' he said, after Mr Darby had disappeared round one of the hillocks, 'coom away. Thou'st saved me—God bless thee for ut—an' thou'st saved *him*.'

The next morning the welcome news was sent round 'Three Ashes' by Tom Nutt that the men might return to work at the advance of wages they demanded. They went to it with a will, and all bygones were treated as bygones. In six months 'Three Ashes' had regained its former degree of honest blackness and rude prosperity. Dick Padley had at last insured his life, and led by him, many others followed. All the other men who met at the Old Dowlas Pit, without an exception, insured their humble chattels; and others followed. Even Mr Darby, after one or two hints which he got from Tom Nutt, was no longer an opponent, but a warm advocate of fire and life insurance.

SHOP.



HOSE who are very familiar with the old town of Greenwich, particularly with that most ancient portion which lies off the High Street towards the river, may probably have noticed a little barber's shop, distinguished by the usual outward signs of the barber's trade, and the inscription, 'Hack-block: established 1750.' The top part of this house is built of wood—of black tarred planks which would be like the side of a ship, if they were not as frail-looking as an egg-chest. The shop part is very low, and is entered by a sunken narrow doorway at the bottom of two well-worn stone steps. The outside of this house might be considered rather repulsive by people who are fond of new brick-work and stucco, but the inside leaves nothing to be desired in neatness and cleanliness. The roof, of course, is low, the floor has a down-hill tendency towards the fire-place; the looking-glass over the mantel-shelf is of that quality which makes the human face look as muddy

as a bad photograph; but the floor is always well sanded, the towels are spotless, and those who keep the shop are evidently devoted to their business. They are a father and son; and though the bulk of the work falls on the younger of the two, the elder does all he can to help, and they evidently live very comfortably together. The father is a little, thin man, nearly eighty years of age, always dressed in drab knee-breeches, with very white stockings, and wearing an apron, and a waistcoat with black sleeves. His hair is very scanty and white, but it is made the most of by judicious brushing and combing; and the son, though a young man about thirty-eight, and careful about his appearance, hardly looks as thoroughly healthy and fresh as his father. Both are what are popularly called well-spoken persons, that is, persons who have had some little education in their youth, which has clung to them in after life; and they are consequently free from the flippancy which is so general amongst common barbers.

Anybody who entered the shaving-shop of the Hackblocks, father and son, for the first time, might suppose that the calm life within had gone on for years without any break or hindrance; that the son was a young man without impulse or ambition, who had always been tied to his father's apron-strings, and was content with an apparently stagnant existence. To those who are drunk with the romance of self-help, who believe that to wander is to thrive, that every boy can become at will a Lord Mayor, or a Lord Chancellor, this contentment of young Hackblock must appear very mean and degrading. Young Hackblock, however, would not be fairly judged by such observers, though his youthful ambition, fed by a restless uncle, an old Greenwich pensioner, was not much to be proud of, if estimated by results.

Commonplace as this old barber's shop and its keepers look, still they have their story, to tell which—and we think it is worth telling—we must go back nearly ten years.

Early in the year 1853, on a cold spring morning, old Hackblock entered his shop—the same shop we have just been describing—rather dejected in appearance. He was then ten years younger than he is now, but he looked quite as old, and more careworn. His niece, Fanny Hackblock, was in the shop when he entered, dusting the scanty furniture, and arranging the old-fashioned shaving-chair with its crutch-like back, for the day's business. Fanny's father, old Hackblock's brother, was a Greenwich pensioner, and Fanny, though she attended to her uncle as much as possible, got her living in the

town as a bonnet-maker. She was a young woman about eight-and-twenty, not what is called pretty, and very plainly dressed.

'Good-morning, uncle,' said Fanny, as old Hackblock entered.

'Ah, Fanny,' said old Hackblock, with a slight air of abstraction, 'making the old place tidy as usual? No one's been in to be shaved?'

'No, uncle,' returned Fanny, 'or I should have called you.'

'They never do come on a Wednesday,' said old Hackblock. 'I might as well shut the shop up on that day, if it wasn't for cutting children's hair in the afternoon, because it's half-holiday at the schools.'

'And that's a job, uncle, I *know* you wouldn't lose.'

'I like to pat their heads and finger their little curls,' said old Hackblock, half musingly; 'although,' he added sadly, 'they often remind me of my poor lost boy.'

'I see father was here yesterday,' continued Fanny, trying to change the conversation, 'by the mess the stove was in with tobacco-ashes. I wish you wouldn't let him smoke so much; I'm sure it isn't good for him.'

'He does as he chooses, Fanny; just as he chooses. Though I'm his elder brother, I don't like to stint him in his pipe, because they're rather strict up at Greenwich Hospital yonder; but I'll never forgive him for causing my poor boy to run away, by his wild yarns about glory, adventures, and foreign countries.'

'Let bygones be bygones, uncle,' said Fanny, persuasively.

'That's the way with relations,' continued old Hackblock, partly to himself; 'they always interfere with your family affairs, always know better what to do with your children than you do yourself.'

'Father thought he was doing all for the best.'

'It was cruel, very cruel; just as the boy was nearly ready to take my place, and handled his razor so cleverly.'

'Cousin Harry was quite as much to blame for going as father was for persuading him to go, when he knew you were almost alone in the world.'

'There's the pinch, Fanny, there's the pinch,' continued old Hackblock, this time addressing his remarks to his niece. 'Perhaps I ought to be glad that he had the spirit to go, but I'm not. When *she* dropped off, the mother of them all, and they all followed her except him, I certainly hoped to keep him near me. It may have been a weak, womanish feeling, but I couldn't help it.'

‘Of course not,’ replied Fanny, sympathizing with her uncle’s evident emotion.

‘And then the business, too,’ continued the old man; ‘it requires a young, steady hand to keep it together. I sometimes think that it’s going, slipping through my old fingers.’

‘Oh, no, uncle,’ returned Fanny; ‘that’s impossible. You’ve been established too long to lose your customers. People don’t forget those who’ve served them for fifty years.’

‘Fifty years?’ exclaimed old Hackblock, in a tone of petulant pride. ‘More than that, Fanny; more than that. A hundred years at least, if you count the time my father had it before me.’

‘Of course; I’d forgotten that, which makes it all the better.’

‘I wish I could think so,’ continued old Hackblock, in a desponding manner, as he fetched a razor from a side-table, and stropped it slowly on a strop; ‘I wish I could think so; but my hand is sometimes very shaky, and people are so nervous about razors.’

‘Oh, no, they’re not, uncle,’ said Fanny, trying to reassure him. ‘I heard old Mr Jones, the baker, say, the other day, that he’d rather be shaved by you in the dark, than by all the chattering shopmen at the new hair-cutting “saloon,” as they call it, in the High Street, by broad day-light.’

‘Ah, that’s because I know all his pimples.’

‘Oh, no, uncle! I’ve heard others say the same who’ve got no pimples.’

‘Have you, Fanny?’ said old Hackblock, brightening up a little. ‘Well, well, I know my business thoroughly, and that goes a long way. Half your barbers now-a-days who call themselves *professors* ought no more to be trusted with a chin or a head of hair than with a rowing-boat on the Thames. I don’t care what a man’s trade may be, but I do like him to learn it thoroughly and to take a pride in it.’

Old Hackblock, at this point of the conversation, sat down in the shaving-chair, continuing his task of stropping the razor, and at the same moment his brother, Boatswain Hackblock, the old Greenwich pensioner, entered the shop. Boatswain Hackblock was about five years younger than the barber, much stouter and stronger, with a red face, bushy eyebrows, and a very obstinate expression. His dress was the ordinary Greenwich pensioner’s dress, he had a wooden leg of the old clumsy make to supply the place of a lost right limb; and to compensate him for this disfigurement, two medals, hanging by ribbons, glittered on his breast.

‘Halloo, my hearties,’ roared out the boatswain, as he stumped

heavily into the little shop, making the fire-irons tremble in the fender; 'what cheer?'

'For goodness' sake, father,' said Fanny, going up to him, 'don't be quite so boisterous; you alarm the neighbourhood, and uncle's got his living to get!'

'Ay, ay,' returned the old pensioner, a little softened; 'give us a pipe of tobacco, and I'll bring myself to an anchor.'

Fanny looked towards her uncle when she heard this request. Old Hackblock nodded his head, and then Fanny went to a jar in the window, from which she took what her father asked for.

'Don't make the stove in such a mess as you did yesterday,' said Fanny, as she gave the tobacco to her father; 'it took me half an hour to clean it this morning, and I shall have to fetch the time up at my bonnet-work.'

'Oh, shiver the work,' returned the old pensioner; 'I believe, if the Hackblocks had their rights, they'd be riding in their carriages like admirals.'

'Well, father,' said Fanny, putting on her bonnet and shawl, 'when you've got a fortune to give me, I'll be a fine lady; but till that time comes I must grub on in the old hard-working way.'

When Fanny had delivered this speech, she ran off to her work at the bonnet-maker's in the town, leaving her father and uncle together. The old pensioner prepared to enjoy himself with his pipe, while old Hackblock seemed to have sunk back into his former melancholy.

'Do you know what day this is?' said old Hackblock, addressing his brother, and stropping the razor slowly.

'I never keep any log, now,' returned the old pensioner, through puffs of smoke, 'and only remember the days when my pension becomes due, and the big-wigs come down to inspect us at the Hospital.'

'Ah, it must be very pleasant to have such a bad memory, Jack,' continued the old barber.

'What tack are you on now, Harry?' asked the old pensioner.

'This is the day on which *he* went away, exactly fourteen years ago: stole off in the night like a thief, without thinking of anybody but himself.'

'Don't drag up that story; the boy thought it was all for the best.'

'Of course *you* say so. If you hadn't filled his head with dreams about prize-money, glory, and Trafalgar, he might now have been a well-to-do barber.'

'Of course he might,' retorted the old pensioner, getting excited;

‘or a well-to-do tailor, or a bonnet-builder, like my girl—or—or—or any other landlubber.’

The delivery of this speech, far from calming the old pensioner, seemed to excite him still more, and he stamped about the room with his wooden leg in a way that endangered the rather tender flooring.

‘Now do be careful, Jack,’ exclaimed the old barber, anxiously, ‘with that wooden leg of yours; you’re not dibbling a potato-field. I can’t afford to pay another pound this quarter to mend the holes which you make in the floor.’

‘Ay, ay,’ returned the old pensioner, becoming a little quieter; ‘you’re all very well, Harry, but you’ve got no pride.’

‘What good’s my boy done by his pride, or rather your pride, which you put into him? He ran away from steady, honest work, became a private soldier, was ordered about for years from station to station like a dog, wrote home just when he wanted a little money, and now Heaven only knows whether he’s alive or dead.’

‘That’s because he went into the wrong service. I didn’t want him to become a soldier, did I? If he’d not been cross-grained, and had listened to me, he’d have been a chief mate by this time, perhaps a captain.’

‘Not he; it’s not in the family.’

‘Oh, isn’t it?’ returned the old pensioner, with great self-importance, displaying the two medals on his breast rather ostentatiously.

‘Ah,’ said the old barber, rather sadly, ‘it’s not the first time, by a good many, that I’ve seen those medals, and heard of them, too. It’s my belief the sight of their glitter helped to make the boy discontented.’

‘If you can’t understand what glory is, Harry, that’s not my fault; I can.’

‘Especially when your wooden leg goes through my floor, and you bawl to me to pull you out.’

‘You wouldn’t have me wear these medals for nothing, would you?—walking about like a beadle who’s never earned his ribbons? You know you’re as proud of the bits of metal as I am, and, if not, you ought to be.’

‘Perhaps I am, Jack,’ replied the old barber, a little softened. ‘Perhaps I am.’

‘They’re no disgrace, are they?’

‘No, no,’ said the old barber, pettishly; ‘but one hero’s quite enough in the family.’

‘Yes,’ retorted the old pensioner, ‘and so’s one barber—more than enough.’

‘I take it very unkindly of you, Jack,’ said old Hackblock, ‘coming here and taunting me about my business. I’ve never disgraced the family in it, have I? It’s what our father got his living at before us.’

‘I can’t stomach it, Harry; it isn’t manly. I can’t bear to see a brother of mine compelled to take every scrubby fellow by the nose who pays him a penny to do so. Why, when I was in active service——’

‘There,’ interposed old Hackblock, stopping his brother’s words, ‘I don’t want to hear any slaughter-house yarns. You’d have done your duty.’

‘Of course I should.’

‘And I’m doing mine. I only want to be left alone to do it. You’ve driven one member of the family out of the business—perhaps to die amongst strangers—be content with that.’

‘Well, come, Harry,’ said the old pensioner, after a slight pause, and in a softened manner, ‘don’t let you and I be at sixes and sevens. There’s plenty of people to quarrel with without two brothers going at it tooth and nail. Give us a bit more tobacco.’

‘You know where to find it,’ returned the old barber; adding, to himself, ‘you smoke all my little profit away on that article.’

Boatswain Hackblock went to the window, helped himself out of the jar, and refilled his pipe. After this he came towards his brother.

‘Harry,’ he said, ‘it wants six weeks to quarter-day.’

‘I’m glad to hear it, Jack,’ returned the old barber.

‘That’s because you’ve got to pay instead of to receive, Harry; I think I must get you to let me have another half-crown to keep me afloat till then.’

‘Afloat in grog, you mean.’

‘No, no,’ returned the old pensioner, apologetically.

Old Hackblock gave his brother the money, after a pause, but with a remark about barber’s work not being quite as profitable as it used to be.

‘You’d better make it a crown,’ said the old pensioner, ‘and then I shan’t have to ask you again.’

This second request was complied with, though not with a very good grace. Old Hackblock had not the firmness to say no, and yet he always felt irritated after he had given the money—for it was

generally a gift in the name of a loan. To avoid more bickering on this occasion, he put on his hat to go out to shave a customer, asking his brother to mind the shop.

‘I’ll do my best, Harry,’ said the old pensioner, in answer to his request, ‘though it’s not exactly in my way.’

When old Hackblock had gone out, the old boatswain settled down over the fire with his pipe and a newspaper. It was the period when the Crimean war was at its height, to the great delight of the old pensioner. He had waited so long for a good war, as he called it, since the great French war in which he was engaged, that he began to think the art of fighting was lost for ever. The fact that the English were fighting side by side with the French, instead of against them, seemed to puzzle him a little, but he solved the difficulty by supposing that it was all for the best. Of course he retained his old prejudices, and called the French ‘Mounseers;’ but in this he was not far behind many better-educated persons who now called them ‘Mossoos.’ Like all obstinate, self-willed people, he never liked to admit, even to himself, that he had made a mistake, and, therefore, he persisted in believing that his nephew, young Harry Hackblock, was alive, well, and prosperous, though the runaway had not been heard of for several years. The last that had been heard of him was from the Cape of Good Hope, where he had been sent with his regiment from the West Indies to quell a disturbance among the Kaffirs. From the Cape his regiment had been sent to the Crimea, at the outbreak of the war; and though there was no evidence to show that he went with it, old Boatswain Hackblock was determined to regard him as alive and in the thick of the battle.

‘He *must* be alive,’ said the old pensioner, as he pored over the warlike news in the paper, ‘and *must* be doing great things, for he’s got more of my spirit in him than his father’s. *He* was never cut for a barber; oh, no; and he’ll turn up some day to prove that I was right, as I always knew I was from the first.’

Judgments formed on much surer grounds than those which seemed to satisfy the old pensioner have been proved to be false before now in the most striking manner, and we can, therefore, hardly feel surprised that at that moment the person old Boatswain Hackblock was talking and thinking about appeared in the low doorway. His dress looked rather shabby and travel-stained, with nothing like military stiffness about it, and in stepping suddenly into the shop he made an old hat look even worse by crushing it against the door-sill. He was fourteen years of age when he left home, and twenty-eight

when he returned, and had forgotten, for the moment, that he had grown two feet higher in his wanderings.

‘Everything seems very small,’ he said to himself, looking round; ‘the streets seem narrow, the distances short, the houses low. Most things have changed very much; I wonder whether father has changed with them.’

Young Harry Hackblock, like all persons returning home after an absence of many years, seemed to have acquired a sudden delicacy of feeling. He felt that his father, whom he knew to be alive, from inquiries he had made in the town, must be getting old and feeble, and that it would hardly be kind to show himself too suddenly. Trusting to the disguise of a dense brown beard, which he had suffered to grow during his travels, and also to the change in his growth and appearance, he resolved to play the part of an ordinary customer for half-an-hour. He was curious to hear what his father really thought of his conduct in running away, and he was candid enough to admit to himself that he deserved very little tenderness.

He had no sooner entered the little shop in the manner we have described than he observed old Boatswain Hackblock reading the newspaper.

‘I do believe that old Greenwich pensioner is my uncle,’ he said to himself, ‘and he’s sitting, as usual, by father’s fire. I don’t think he’s altogether a humbug, but he deceived me nicely with his yarns about glory.’

Knowing his uncle’s chief weakness, young Hackblock shouted out ‘shop,’ very loudly.

‘Sir!’ said the old boatswain, leaping in his seat, and turning round suddenly.

‘Shop!’ repeated young Hackblock, with marked emphasis.

‘What d’ye come in without knocking for?’ asked the old pensioner, indignantly.

‘We never knock at *shops*,’ returned young Hackblock.

‘I don’t know anything about shops; what d’ye want?’

‘A barber, of course.’

‘You’d better call another time. My brother (hem), Mr Hackblock, is out.’

‘No, I shan’t; I shall wait.’

‘Very well, sir, wait.’

‘When Boatswain Hackblock had finished his part in this dialogue, he turned round rather sulkily to read his paper, sitting more closely than before over the fire, and leaving young Hackblock to do as he liked.’

'A good guard to leave in charge of a shop,' said the disguised nephew, to himself, 'if you want to drive all the customers away. Ah,' he continued, looking round the shop, 'I suppose that's the old block on which I used to dress wigs, and that's the old strap on which I used to sharpen razors. I might have learned a worse trade than that, though I didn't think so at one time.'

The mumblings of the young man appeared to disturb the old pensioner, and it is possible that another altercation would have ensued, if Fanny Hackblock had not entered at that moment. She had a large bonnet-box in her hand, which she placed on a side-table near the fireplace; and as young Hackblock was seated in the old, deep shaving-chair, she did not notice him for a minute or two.

'There,' said she, audibly, taking off her bonnet and shawl, 'I've brought as much work as I shall be able to get through this afternoon; and then, as it's a slack day with uncle, I can mind the shop while he takes a walk—I'm sure he wants it.'

By this time she had observed young Hackblock, though without recognizing him, and she apologized for her uncle's absence, saying that he would be back in a few minutes.

'That must be my cousin Fanny, then,' said young Hackblock to himself; 'I am sure I shouldn't have known her if I had met her in the street. She's more improved than her father has. His wooden leg's the only thing about him that's not altered for the worse; but that, perhaps, is a new one.'

Young Hackblock's reflections were here interrupted by the entrance of his father, who looked as if something had just occurred to annoy him.

'Fanny,' said the old man, rather sadly, beckoning his niece towards him, and not seeming to notice anyone else, 'you told me something this morning about old Mr Jones, the baker.'

'Yes, uncle,' replied Fanny, 'about his confidence in you.'

'Was it true?' asked the old man, with a slight look of suspicion.

'Uncle!' returned Fanny, hurt and astonished, 'you don't think I'd deceive you?'

'No—no.'

'What's the matter?'

'He's gone over to the rival shop—the "*saloon*," as they call it.'

'Oh, he'll soon get tired of that,' said Fanny, in a reassuring tone, though she inwardly hoped that some harm from careless shaving would happen to Mr Jones's pimples.

'I suppose there's a good reason for it,' said old Hackblock,

resignedly ; 'I'm not so quick and certain as I was,—I can't be,—I can't be.'

'Rubbish,' replied Fanny, rather coarsely, but with a good intention ; 'I know the reason. They take more loaves at the "*saloon*" than we do. He's been bought over by that.'

'Very likely, Fanny,' continued the old man, 'we can't eat more bread than we do unless another mouth was present. We eat as much now as we can pay for.'

Young Hackblock overheard his conversation, and it had a strong effect upon him. He was just about to rise from the chair, and declare who he was, when he was checked by Fanny recalling the old barber to his business.'

'You're forgetting a new customer, uncle,' said Fanny, pointing to young Hackblock.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said the old man, addressing his son without knowing him, 'but I've been rather put about. I'm not one who likes to neglect his business.'

'I know that, I know that,' replied young Hackblock.

Fanny went to the side-table and began her work, leaving the old barber to do his.

'Hair cut, or shaved, sir?' said the old man, in a [familiar, tradesmanlike tone.

'Well,' returned young Hackblock, who had suddenly hit upon a plan for gradually making known who he was, 'it may seem strange to you, but I want to get rid of this beard.'

'Oh, no,' returned old Hackblock ; 'not at all strange—not at all. It seems stranger to me that anybody should wear such a load of hair.'

'What !' shouted Boatswain Hackblock, rousing himself, and looking round when he heard this,—'Wants his beard shaved off!—a full-grown beard shaved off? He'll want his head shaved next !'

Young Hackblock merely smiled at this petulant outburst ; but old Hackblock, thinking his customer would be offended, felt very nervous, and Fanny, sharing in the same feeling, tried to quiet her father. The old barber fetched his razor and strop, and prepared his lather, and the old boatswain turned once more to his newspaper.

'No one seems to know me,' said young Hackblock to himself, as if he felt rather disappointed ; 'surely my father will recollect me when my beard is shaved off? I can't have grown entirely out of remembrance?'

'Are you a stranger in Greenwich, sir?' asked old Hackblock, as he made his preparations.

'Oh, no!' returned young Hackblock; 'I know it very well, though I've been away from it for a long time. It seems a good deal changed.'

'Still it's a nice place; I don't know a nicer place,' said old Hackblock, admiringly.

'Of course not, and why?' again interrupted Boatswain Hackblock. 'Because you've lived here like a mushroom, all your life.'

'I don't think that's any disgrace, father,' said Fanny, defending her uncle.

'Nor I either,' said young Hackblock.

'I've not done as well as I might,' replied the old barber meekly; 'but that's not altogether my fault. I know many rolling stones that haven't done much better.'

'Ah, you may well say that,' responded young Hackblock, with earnestness.

'Have you travelled much, sir?' inquired the old barber, as he stropped his razor.

'A good deal too much,' was the answer.

'No one but a born landlubber *can* travel too much,' exclaimed Boatswain Hackblock, again aroused.

'I *am* a born landlubber,' returned young Hackblock.

'I'm sorry to hear it.'

Fanny and old Hackblock again got very nervous, and the old barber even offered to check his brother; but young Hackblock motioned him to take no notice of the interruption, and he returned to his task.

'Your hair's very gray, sir, for a young man, and rather thin, too,' said the old barber, speaking the truth, though he was uttering the common jargon of his trade.

'I wouldn't advise you to say much about that,' replied young Hackblock.

'Why not?'

'Because I had it of you.'

The old boatswain joined in here again with a loud, mocking laugh.

'If it's one of my wigs,' returned the old barber, with some pride, 'I don't wonder that it deceived me. They were always thought to be more natural than the real hair.'

'I know they were,' replied young Hackblock, beginning to be sorry for his joke: 'but my hair is not a wig. When I said it was

yours, I meant that it grew up under your guidance. You used to dress it and cut it,' he added, feelingly, 'and take a pride in it as if it was your own.'

'Yes,' roared out Boatswain Hackblock, 'and soak it, as he does the whole of his customers, with dripping pomatum. Ha, ha! I don't wonder that it turned gray. You were caught there, brother Harry, completely caught.'

'You always know everybody's business, Jack, better than your own,' exclaimed the old barber, this time with some spirit. 'I'm not responsible for a head of hair after it leaves my shop, am I? My memory's not so good as it was; but I am sure this gentleman'—alluding to his unrecognized son—'has not been here for some years.'

'Twelve or fourteen years, at least,' replied young Hackblock.

'Ah,' said the old barber, sadly, 'about the time my foolish boy, Harry, ran away from his bread.'

'Your name's Hackblock, isn't it?' asked the young man, with suppressed emotion.

'It is.'

'Wasn't your son once in the army—a private in the 42nd Foot, which was moved from Jamaica, some years ago, to the Cape of Good Hope?'

'He was,' replied the old barber, leaving off shaving his customer, while Fanny leaned forward to listen.

'Yes, yes, he was,' exclaimed Boatswain Hackblock, this time chiming in anxiously, though pettishly.

'Then I'm sure I knew him,' returned the young man, watching keenly the effect of his words on his father.

The old barber dropped his razor, and put up his hands towards his ears.

'Is—he—alive?' he asked, pausing between his words, and dreading to hear the reply.

Fanny and the old boatswain came forward.

'He is,' replied the young man, quickly.

'Thank Heaven,' said Fanny; but old Hackblock could not speak. He wiped his face with a towel which he held in his hand, and trembled violently. Boatswain Hackblock took the good news less quietly.

'Of course he is; I knew he was,' he shouted, stamping his wooden leg violently on the floor, 'and doing well, too? Eh, young man?'

‘What would you call well?’ asked the young man, as the old barber tried to compose himself once more for his task of shaving.

‘What should I call well?’ asked Boatswain Hackblock, almost derisively; ‘why, promotion—rewards—reputation. Has he been in action? Did he wound many people, eh?’

‘Yes, several,’ returned young Hackblock.

‘Good, good!’ was the response.

‘How can you be so bloodthirsty, father,’ said Fanny, ‘when you’ve retired from business?’

‘Don’t talk to me,’ returned Boatswain Hackblock, impetuously; ‘an old salt never retires from business. What did he wound them with, eh, young man? the gun or the bayonet?’

‘Neither.’

‘Neither?’ asked the old barber, anxiously.

‘What with, then?’ inquired Boatswain Hackblock, with growing impatience. ‘A sword?’

‘No,’ replied young Hackblock, still playing with his uncle’s curiosity.

‘What with, then? what with, then?’ asked the old boatswain, now growing very red in the face, and stamping his wooden leg upon the ground.

‘Well, if you must have it,’ replied young Hackblock, while his eyes twinkled, ‘it was a razor.’

‘A razor!’ exclaimed the old pensioner, his brother, and Fanny, in chorus.

‘Yes, a razor; there’s nothing extraordinary in that; people are very easily wounded with razors.’

‘Don’t beat about the bush, sir,’ said the old boatswain testily. ‘Is he promoted?’

‘Yes,’ replied young Hackblock. ‘He became the barber of his regiment.’

This announcement had the effect of making old Hackblock smile with satisfaction, while Fanny laughed outright. Boatswain Hackblock, after the first explosion of rage, recovered himself sufficiently to speak, but not before he had stamped half round the shop in his usual style.

‘Barber to his regiment!’ he said, bitterly, ‘barber to his regiment! Why, hang me, he’d better have stopped at home—much better.’

‘I always said so, Jack, I always said so,’ returned the old barber,

rather triumphantly. 'What's bred in the bone, you know—it's my turn to laugh now.'

'There's one comfort,' retorted the old boatswain, clinging to his last chance of escape from defeat; 'he'll have to fight in the Crimea—barber or no barber.'

'He's not in the Crimea,' said young Hackblock.

'Not in the Crimea?—not at the seat of war?' shouted the old boatswain, with renewed excitement.

'No; he bought out of his regiment some years ago, and started a small easy-shaving shop—much smaller than this—at Cape Town.'

'Easy-shaving shop!' shouted Boatswain Hackblock, with riotous contempt, while the old barber's delight increased. 'Easy cats'-meat shop! He's a disgrace to the family.'

'No, Jack,' said the old barber, interposing with much natural dignity and feeling; 'I'm the best judge of that. I don't approve of his clumsiness with the razor, which this gentleman has mentioned—I can hardly believe in it when I know what a careful education I gave him, and how he used to shave the customers here. I don't approve of his not writing home for so many years—but—but I've heard nothing that tells me he's disgraced his family. He's not disgraced *me*!'

Young Hackblock could hardly suppress the emotion naturally aroused by this speech, but, by a great effort, he prevented himself rising to declare himself at once.

'You may well say what's bred in the bone,' grumbled Boatswain Hackblock, as he retired to the fire-place to smoke, followed by Fanny—'none of you've got any proper pride except me.'

The old barber, after this, resumed his task of shaving his customer, with a very shaking hand, and with many anxious inquiries about his supposed absent son.

'Tell me more, sir, about him,' he said, 'tell me more. Why didn't he write? He ought to have written.'

'He ought,' returned the young man, 'but he has an excuse. He grew ashamed of drawing money from home after having run away, and made up his mind not to write until he could say that he was better off.'

The old barber had now nearly half finished his task, and nearly one side of young Hackblock's beard had been shaved off. The old man seemed to be struggling with some thought or recollection, for he walked a few steps away from the shaving-chair, and looked curiously at his customer.

‘He started in the business he had been bred up to,’ continued young Hackblock, appearing not to notice his father’s change of manner, ‘hoping to get on, but several years soon passed without any luck.’

‘Strange!’ murmured old Hackblock to himself, leaving his task again, and looking at his customer keenly from another point of view; ‘I can hardly hold the razor! I cannot be dreaming?’

‘As he couldn’t make a fortune,’ still continued young Hackblock, though with decreased command over himself, ‘he scraped together his passage money.’

The old barber, by this time, had finished his task, and his son’s face stood before him free from all its unfamiliar covering. The old man hesitated once more for a moment, but only for a moment, and before Fanny and the old boatswain could get round the old shaving-chair, the father and son were re-united and the truth was revealed.

After the first burst of joy and astonishment was over, the old boatswain could not refrain from amusing himself at the expense of his brother.

‘Harry,’ he said to the old barber, who was now sitting down half exhausted in the shaving-chair, ‘you’re caught again. It’s a wise father who doesn’t know his own son, isn’t it?’

‘I *must* have known him all along, Jack,’ returned the old man, almost crying, ‘for I’m sure I never shaved anybody so badly in my life.’

‘Ah, tell that to the marines,’ replied the old boatswain, incredulously.

‘Let us settle all family differences now,’ said the old barber, kindly, ‘and start afresh. We can’t all be big-drummers, that we know; but we can all try with heart and soul to be good little ones.’*

A GIPSY KING.



THE greatest weakness that poor aunt had, was a passion for adoption, and irregular servants. To begin, she adopted me—her niece. Our boy, who was page and waiter at table, was a transported burglar’s orphan. Our two maid-servants were workhouse castaways. Our late coachman and general man-servant was a ticket-of-leave holder, who did not turn out well; and, at last, we adopted in his place a gipsy king. Aunt

* The right of dramatising this story has been reserved and exercised by the author.

—or Miss Granite, as I ought to call her—was a maiden lady between fifty and sixty, possessed of considerable property, great strength of character, and unflinching moral courage. This was her very sensible, though somewhat eccentric, idea of practical charity. Perhaps she was right; for, as a whole, her system worked well. She rose superior to the opinion of her neighbours, although we lived in a small, dull village, about fifteen miles on the high-road from London to Dover; and our villa, being next door to the rural station-house, the majesty of the law, if required, could have been turned on at any moment.

The ticket-of-leave man had a brother in the village, who, in my opinion, was no better than the convict, only he had never been found out; and this brother, feeling ashamed of his relative's presence, was always urging him privately to go to Australia. This unceasing family pressure at last had its effect; and, one night, he disappeared, taking enough of Miss Granite's loose cash with him to defray the cost of his passage.

It was getting late in the autumn; the weather was cold and chilly; the trees were standing under bare branches; the soil round the town was of a clayey nature; there had been much rain for many weeks, and the mists were damp and dispiriting. About the middle of a very dismal day at this period, a dirty, ragged man, of the tramp species, was observed to walk to and fro for some little time, in the hope of attracting the attention of the inmates; but, as no one went to the gate, he at last ventured to ring the bell. Miss Granite was looking through the drawing-room window, and at once made amends for her neglect, by ordering the unpromising stranger to be invited in. Although he had looked dirty, unprepossessing, and half-wild outside the house, when he entered our presence his appearance was infinitely worse. His clothes were patched with rags, like a bed-quilt, and the patches were again re-patched with clay. His face was sharp, brown, and grizzly; and his hands were nearly the colour of treacle. His object was to solicit the place left vacant by the absconded ticket-of-leave man.

'Where have you lived before?' asked my aunt. The visitor was silent.

'I don't care where it was,' continued my aunt, 'so long as I know the truth: I'm above all vulgar prejudices.'

'Well, mum,' he said, slowly, 'I 'avn't lived anywheres to speak on, except in the woods. I'm a gipsy king.'

'A what?' exclaimed Miss Granite, in astonishment.

'A gipsy king, mum,' returned the stranger, timidly, 'an' a werry 'ard life it is, mum!'

My aunt for some few minutes remained silent. The stranger waited for her to take up the conversation, and I felt very much disposed to laugh.

'Is it possible,' said Miss Granite, 'that one of your ancient, wandering race can think of settling down in the homes of civilization?'

'Yes, mum,' replied the gipsy king, 'that's hexactly what it is.'

'You are sincere,' asked Miss Granite, 'in your desire to forsake your tribe?'

'They didn't do the thing as was right by me,' said the gipsy king, evasively; 'they took a husurper; let 'em keep 'im.'

'You have no wish to be any longer considered a king?' asked Miss Granite, with some tone of respect in her voice.

'Gipsy kings, mum, is all werry well to talk about over a fire,' he answered, 'an' all werry well to sing about over a pianner,' he added, turning to me; 'but let 'em try it in the winter, that's all!'

This last answer seemed satisfactory to aunt, and it explained to me pretty clearly the motives that had governed the stranger's application for the place. The weather was quite severe enough to drive every tribe of real or professed gipsies into comfortable winter quarters, except those who were content to be petrified with rheumatism and chilblains.

The gipsy king retired to the apartment of his predecessor, the late ticket-of-leave man, and in the course of an hour he acquired the appearance of another individual. Two buckets of water, several cakes of soap, and the half-livery of the last servant (the best suit he had left behind him), turned the gipsy king into a very presentable groom—even for a village.

'What name shall we call you by?' asked Miss Granite, when he came into the sitting-room for orders.

'Well, mum,' he replied, 'if it's all the same to you, I should like to drop my real name, which no one could make anythin' of, an' answer to the call of Sam.'

'We shall call you Samuel,' said Miss Granite, with some dignity, 'we have no nicknames here.'

My own impression is, that the gipsy king would, if properly treated, have sunk in time into a steady, common-place servant. The influence of regular habits and regular meals was beginning to tell upon his frame, and while he lost his hungry sharpness of face,

he acquired a very respectable rotundity of body. The proverbial restlessness and activity of his race were certainly becoming faded in him, for no one of the small kitchen household was so often found asleep before the fire. He was spoiled by his fellow-servants. They told him wonderful stories of his people that he had never heard before, and they sang unto him the wild songs of his native tribes (as published by the music-sellers). They read to him (for he could not read himself) a cheap penny history of Bampfylde Moore Carew; and though he openly called the wandering gentleman an idiot and a fool, the poison sank into his soul. They would not let him alone; but taught him cheerful ballads of a gipsy's life, until his not very powerful mind began to give way, and he passed much of his time in dreaming of the lost poetry of the woods and fields.

He was a tolerably steady man, but a very unsteady coachman. His knowledge of wild horses might have been very great—as great as he said it was—but for the first two months he could scarcely turn our old mare, Nancy, in the road, and he was quite unequal to backing her up a heavy lane. Miss Granite seemed perfectly satisfied with him, and therefore no one else could complain; and she always treated him with much ceremony, in consideration of the title he had given up on entering her service.

The winter, which was a very severe one, passed by, and the spring came in very warm and early. About the middle of March we were sitting with open windows; the grass was rich and full, and the birds were singing in the trees that were prematurely covered with leaves. The songs which the gipsy king had learnt of the servants he sang more loudly and more frequently about the house and stable-yard; and for the last two months he had claimed his periodical holidays, and had spent them, as far as I could learn, in wandering about the country.

Miss Granite had a custom of going to London twice a year—early in April and early in October—to see her stockbroker, and transact a little city business. I never knew what she did on these occasions, my duty being simply to accompany her in the carriage, to wait until she was ready to return, to dine with her at a particular pastrycook's, and afterwards to ride with her home. The coachman had always half-a-crown given him, and permission to spend it at a particularly old tavern near the Bank of England.

Of course these visits to the metropolis were always made in our own carriage, as it was exactly at that period when coaches had ceased to run, and railways had not yet thoroughly taken their place.

The vehicle was brought to our door about ten o'clock in the morning, and we drove leisurely to the city (not to distress the horses), arriving there about half-past one. At five o'clock—allowing time for rest and baiting—we again took our seats, and got home between eight and nine to tea or supper. This is precisely what we had done, to my knowledge, eighteen times during the last nine years, and this is what Miss Granite, in the early part of the April of which I am writing, prepared to do again.

Our coach was old-fashioned, but comfortable; a yellow chariot that would have held six upon an emergency, but which (except when Miss Granite placed it at the disposal of a children's party) never held but our two selves. Miss Granite used to sit by herself on the broad cushion facing the driver, as she could not ride with her back to the horses; and I used to sit opposite, as she always liked plenty of room. The two horses were bony and majestic, and we never knew what their full speed was, as it had never been tried. The mare, Nancy, was rather restive, but the other horse was easily managed.

This was the equipage with which, on a bright spring morning, like a summer's morning, we started for London, the gipsy king being elevated upon his novel throne, the coach-box. He had driven us before about the country, with more or less skill, but this was his first metropolitan journey. I had my misgivings, but it was useless to express them.

We went on very well, even down Shooter's Hill, until we got into the busy part of the Old Kent Road; and there I noticed the wheels of heavy waggons very close to our windows, and we received several severe bumps. When we reached the Borough, these signs of bad coachmanship became more frequent; and we heard the sounds of loud, angry, and laughing voices, the slashing of whips across the top of our chariot, and saw the meaning gestures of many omnibus-drivers and hackney-cabmen. The passage of London Bridge and King William Street was an agony of terror to me, though aunt seemed to bear it all very calmly. At length we drew up at our destination, the gipsy king received his half-a-crown and his instructions, and we went about our business.

Punctually at our usual time (five o'clock) we made our appearance to return, and we found the gipsy king in readiness with the vehicle. We took our seats; our monarch mounted his throne; and, after considerable difficulty in turning the horses' heads, during which a dozen people seemed to volunteer their services, we were at

last fairly started on the road home. The passage of the Bridge and Borough seemed to have increased tenfold in difficulty since the morning, and yet our driver, as if by inspiration, flew through all. Other drivers still looked at us, and once I heard a shout, and felt a bump, and saw a truck rolling over in the gutter; but still we kept on our headlong course. Aunt, whose nerves are like iron, had gone fast asleep, and her body was jumping from side to side like a puppet in a Punch and Judy show. The horses had never been put upon their mettle before, and they seemed delighted and astonished at their speed. I looked through the window behind me, and saw the gipsy king flourishing his whip above his head, and bumping up and down on his throne, like a jockey riding a race.

We soon left the town far in our rear, and still we kept on. Aunt had by this time become thoroughly aroused, and half-persuaded that something was wrong. All attempts to arrest the course of the gipsy king were unavailing, and Miss Granite was about to break the glass, and try to pull the wild driver from his seat, when a sudden collision with some roadside obstacle shook the vehicle like a jelly, cast us both into each other's arms, and threw both the horses on their haunches. We quickly recovered ourselves, and seized the opportunity to jump out, and question the gipsy king upon such reckless behaviour. He had got his horses on their legs again, and he was grinning with a stupid leer of satisfaction.

'Samuel,' said Miss Granite, with stern decision, 'you're intoxicated: where are we?'

'Mum,' returned Samuel, and he was intoxicated, 'you've done the—thing—'s—right—byme, an'—the gip—'s—'art's gra—grateful.'

'Where are we?' again asked Miss Granite, with extraordinary firmness, while I trembled nervously, for we were on a bleak common, and it was now nearly dusk.

'You know—me,' returned the gipsy king, confidentially, 'my 'ome—sholly ole green'ood tree! Am I right?'

'Samuel,' returned Miss Granite, 'my home is Bexley town, and I insist upon being taken there.'

'Mum,' stammered the gipsy king, with much difficulty, and holding out his hand, 'this 'and's—a—gip—'s 'and, but's never bin stai—stained wi' crime.' And then he proceeded very clumsily to mount his coach-box, singing all the while in a weak, shrill, uncertain voice,

'Sa—a—a—fly fol—low 'im;
Sa—a—a—fly fol—low 'im.'

‘This is the teaching of those foolish girls at home, aunt,’ I said, feeling that I must say something, or faint.

‘I don’t know what it is, my dear,’ returned Miss Granite, ‘but I’m determined we will not return home with that drunken idiot, if we wander about the country all night.’

The gipsy king had by this time seated himself upon the coach-box, with the reins in his hands.

‘You won’t—mum—werry well,’ he said, addressing my aunt in a little louder tone, as he saw us moving away, ‘you’ll ’ear from me, mum—’cos I will. Rob’ry the gip—scorns as he flies—to’s forest ’ome.’

Saying this, he flourished his whip; and, singing loudly some song about the pleasures of a gipsy’s life, he drove madly across the common, and was soon lost in the distance, amongst the trees.

That was the last we ever saw of the gipsy king, or of the carriage. We reached a labourer’s cottage, where we passed the night, and we reached our home the next evening by posting across the country. Miss Granite, in her usual way, would have no inquiry made about her loss, and she rather indulged the belief that the gipsy king had killed himself by driving over a precipice. For myself, I could only suppose that the horses had been sold at a fair in the regular irregular way; and that the carriage, if not turned into a show, was built up and disguised in the almost inaccessible depths of some forest, where it afforded a snug house of call for tramps, or a winter home for gipsies and gipsy babies.

THE OLD HOUSE.

PART I.



SOME few years ago there stood, not far from the river, to the east of London, an old, many-shaped, detached house, which was occupied by a middle-aged, commonplace, pompous gentleman, of the name of Gudgeons. He was the secretary to some public company (I believe a great gas or water company); and a man who believed in no one—not even in the chairman and board of directors—so much as in himself. He knew everything—at least, so he thought; he was prepared for

every emergency—at least, so he believed. His life was insured in the oldest and safest office; his property was insured in another office, equally old and equally safe; he dealt with the best butcher, the best grocer, and the best baker; he knew the exact position of the nearest fire-engine and the nearest fire-escape; and he knew the names and addresses of the best physicians for different kinds of disease. He was always supplied with a chest of the very best medicine from Apothecaries' Hall, and a cellar of the best wine from the leading wine-merchant. His servants were carefully selected, and an ample and precise record kept of their character-pedigree, from the earliest traces of their servitude. His plate and property were securely locked up every night in a large iron safe in his own bed-chamber; his fire-arms were always well loaded, within reach, and in a place of safety; and the entrances to his dwelling were provided with an ample supply of the best scientific alarums. What had Mr Gudgeons to fear from accident, disease, or crime? What, indeed?

Mr Gudgeons's family consisted of his wife, a nice quiet woman, of no very great ability, and three children—a girl-baby, aged eleven months, and two boys, aged respectively seven and eight years. In governing this family he had his own peculiar notions upon education. History he considered to be a great mistake, especially when it went further back than forty or fifty years. No man ought to encumber his brains with anything except the times and the society in which he lived. The battle of Waterloo was the last decisive contest of the world; beyond that it was fruitless to go: and there the schoolmaster of the two Masters Gudgeons was particularly requested to stop. Besides regulating the instruction of his boys by day, he imparted additional information to them at night. Blue-books were brought home from the office, and Master Tom, the youngest, and Master Harry, the eldest, were examined, even at their early age, upon their knowledge of population, imports, exports, banking, joint-stock companies, and the statistics of crime.

'Papa,' asked the eldest boy, on one occasion, during these distasteful catechisms, 'who was the Duke of Monmouth?'

'Yes, papa,' rejoined the youngest, emboldened by the example of his brother; 'and who was Perkin Warbeck?'

The first question was bad enough, but the second was infinitely worse. Mr Gudgeons was not prepared with any precise information concerning either of these historical personages; and the boys were therefore reproved for their idle curiosity, and sent to bed.

If Mr Gudgeons had his prejudices concerning remote history, his

dislike for fiction amounted to positive horror. 'Novels, sir,' he was fond of saying over his dinner-table—'pooh! rubbish! trash! Who write them? Chairmen of public companies don't? Directors of public companies don't? Secretaries of public companies don't.'

It was impossible, however, to keep Master Tom and Master Harry from the bane of knowing 'Robinsen Crusoe' and 'Sinbad the Sailor;' and as the books containing the stories of these interesting individuals were carefully excluded from the house, the two boys were driven to gratify their natural appetite for the wonderful upon much more questionable food.

Mr Gudgeons was one evening unexpectedly passing the door of the room set aside as a nursery, when he heard a voice reading aloud, which he recognized as belonging to the nursemaid, Sarah Finch. Curiosity prompted Mr Gudgeons to listen, and further, to look through a crevice in the door, when he discovered his two sons seated open-mouthed by the side of the servant, engrossed by the interest of the narrative she was reading.

'“Never,” ejaculated the Count in a voice of thunder,’ said Sarah Finch, reading from the book; ““never!” and raising his dagger, he was about to plunge it into the bosom of the unfortunate Countess, when the old hag of the forest seemed to dart through the wall, and before the guilty Count could recover himself, he was lying on the floor, while the Countess and the old woman had disappeared together.’

Mr Gudgeons retired at once to his best drawing-room, where Mrs Gudgeons was seated, and rang the bell for Sarah Finch and the two boys. In a few moments they came, but not without a foreboding as to the cause of their summons.

'Well!' said Mr Gudgeons to Sarah Finch, with all his dignity and authority thrown into an attempt at sarcasm, 'so the Count cried “Never,” in a voice of thunder, did he? He raised his dagger to plunge it into the Countess, when the old hag of the forest appeared through the floor, did she?'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Sarah Finch, 'I was only reading to amuse the young gentlemen.'

'And do you suppose,' continued Mr Gudgeons, 'that the young gentlemen—my sons—can be amused with such a string of absurdities as that? Do I ever ejaculate “Never,” in a voice of thunder? Do I ever raise a dagger to plunge it into your mistress? and does any old hag of any old forest ever come through any floor or wall? Absurd rubbish! Where's the book?'

The book was sent for, and found to be an old novel called 'The Lonely One of the Heath,' printed very badly upon very yellow sugar-paper, much worn and plastered with dirt at the edges, and bound in two thick slices of dirty shoe-leather.

'Now, Sarah Finch,' said Mr Gudgeons, with much solemnity, taking the book, 'I shall destroy this idiotic volume of trash; and if I find you again indulging in such books, or bringing them under the notice of my children, I shall be compelled to discharge you upon the spot, with a very indifferent character. You can go. Thomas and Henry, retire to bed.'

Sarah Finch returned to the nursery, vexed at the loss of her book, and the two boys went to bed.

The nursery of Mr Gudgeons's house was a room on a level with the drawing-rooms, but apart from the rest of the building. Below it was another apartment, used as a store and lumber department, and both the rooms evidently belonged to a house of much older date than the mansion to which they appeared to be rather inharmoniously attached. The store-room was so loaded with old furniture, and disfigured with modern shelves, which had been erected to contain the preserves and other articles, that little of its original aspect remained to strike the eye, except a tone much more gloomy than the rest of the house. The nursery having been very little altered or re-decorated, retained its original features—a dark oaken wainscoting; a lofty, murky ceiling, and plastered-over rafters; a fireplace, in which a tall man could stand upright, with much carving in oak all round the sides and along the mantel-shelf, almost black with smoke and age; dark, polished, oaken flooring boards, very narrow, smooth, and closely bound together; and a large arched window in a recess, looking out on the garden. There was an old beech-tree in the garden, about ten yards from this window, whose broad, thick trunk added to the sombre appearance of this room and the store-room below. The mossy branches of this tree spread outwards in all directions, some passing over the roof of the main mansion, others over the roof of this ancient outbuilding. The nursery was very scantily furnished, for it was the play-room of the children by day, as it was the bedchamber of Sarah Finch, the nurse, by night. Her bed stood in an arched cupboard recess on the right as you entered the door, which was near the wall on the garden side. At the other corner, still on the right of the entrance door, and against the main mansion, was another arched recess, which contained nothing but two cotton dresses belonging to Sarah Finch. This recess had doors,

which closed it in, but the doors of the recess where the bed stood had been taken away, their place being supplied with curtains.

Sarah Finch was an ordinary young woman, about thirty, inclined to be fat, considered trustworthy and steady, not attached to any follower, properly vaccinated, with no tendency to lunacy or scrofula, fond of children, born near Cambridge, father dead, mother living; had been in two other situations, where she had lived respectably and respectively six years and three years; and she had already been in Mr Gudgeons's family near four years. These were the particulars contained in Mr Gudgeons's book of servants' characters, each fact being duly entered in a separate column, and the whole signed 'Sarah Finch,' in a handwriting not unlike that of poor Guido Fawkes when he was taken from the rack.

Sarah Finch's hour of retiring to rest was half-past ten, when Mrs Gudgeons came to see if the candle was properly extinguished; and at half-past ten she retired as usual on this particular night. Her duties had been slightly increased during the last fortnight by the task of weaning young Miss Elizabeth, or Bessy Gudgeons, as she was called, aged eleven months. This broke Sarah Finch's rest, which she did not much like, but it gave her some kind of companion by way of reward. Of course she had complained to her master (her mistress had little voice in the management of the house) about the large, gloomy character of her sleeping apartment; and, of course, her complaints had been treated with the contempt they deserved. Her request to have the cook, or the waiting-maid, sent down to sleep with her was not complied with, because the recess was only large enough to contain a bed for one, and the whole apartment was required during the day as a play-room for the boys. Any nervous timidity she may have exhibited was very quickly put down by a gentleman of such a practical and unimaginative turn of mind as Mr Gudgeons.

Miss Bessy Gudgeons, considering her age, bore her weaning process very amiably. She slept in a small iron cot, which was squeezed into the recess by the side of Sarah Finch's bed, and, after being fed with a bottle before retiring to rest (about seven o'clock in the evening), nothing more was heard of her by her nurse until about two o'clock in the morning, when she required to be fed again. Sarah Finch was a sound sleeper, and a good sharp cry was necessary to wake her.

It was daylight the next morning when Sarah Finch awoke—daylight on a November morning, about seven o'clock. Rubbing her

eyes, she looked into the little iron bedstead for the child, and not seeing it very clearly, she rubbed them again, to discover that it was not there. She put her hand under her own pillow in an instant, and found the bottle of food, wrapped up in flannel to keep it warm: it was untouched. Leaping from the bed, she looked underneath it round the recess, over the room, in the other recess, and finally she ran to the door to find it still locked, as she had locked it last night after Mrs Gudgeons had left.

Sarah Finch was not strong-minded, nor particularly superstitious; and under the painful and mysterious circumstances in which she was placed, she behaved with very praiseworthy coolness. She hurriedly put on some clothing, and proceeded nervously and anxiously to the sleeping apartment of Mr and Mrs Gudgeons. She knocked sharply at the door, and was answered by Mr Gudgeons, who was a tolerably early riser, and who appeared with his face half covered with shaving-lather.

‘Now, then,’ said Mr Gudgeons, ‘what’s the matter?’

‘Is the baby here, sir?’ asked Sarah Finch, breathlessly.

‘Certainly not!’ returned Mr and Mrs Gudgeons, simultaneously.

‘Then it’s gone, sir, as sure as I stand here!’ said the distressed nurse: ‘stolen out of the room at night, mum! Oh, I told you so, sir! I never liked the room; I knew they would. Oh, good gracious!’ Here Sarah Finch took the liberty of fainting before her master, just as he and Mrs Gudgeons were about to overwhelm her with a variety of anxious questions.

The household was soon alarmed, and, leaving Sarah Finch in the care of the waiting-maid, Mr Gudgeons went at once to the nursery, where his wife had gone before him.

‘Am I asked to believe,’ said Mr Gudgeons, after examining the fastenings of the windows, and looking round the room, ‘that thieves break into my house without disturbing my alarms, and only steal a baby?’

‘Babies can’t go without hands,’ said Mrs Gudgeons, sobbing. ‘If I could only see the poor little dear in its little coffin, I should know it was happy.’

‘Yes, mum,’ said the cook, who had come into the room, ‘just as it took so much notice too, mum. Don’t take on so, mum, I beg.’

Mr Gudgeons was a man of decision, and did not waste much time in idle grief. ‘James,’ he said to the gardener and general man-servant, who had joined the cook, ‘I leave Sarah Finch in your custody. Jane,’ this was to the cook, ‘fetch a cab.’

The cab was fetched, and Mr Gudgeons got into it. He believed in excellence only when it was well advertised. If his wife's leg had been broken, he would have driven to Sir Lambert Daniel, the celebrated surgeon; if it had been a case of family cholera, he would have driven to Dr Calomel, the great physician; if a serious accident had happened to his horse, he would have driven to Mr Spavin, the renowned veterinary practitioner: and, as his baby had been stolen, he drove to the well-known Secret Investigation Office of Messrs Meadows and Winks.

PART II.



It was rather an early hour to go to any office upon business; but the profession of Messrs Meadows and Winks was a peculiar profession, and there was a principal in attendance at every hour of the day and night.

When a man goes to a firm of two or more members for the first time, he generally asks for the partner whose name may head the list, and without knowing what that person's measure of ability may be, or even if there is really such an individual in existence, he feels excessively disappointed when informed he is not within, and is not expected in town for several weeks. This was particularly the case with Mr Gudgeons, who always liked to have everything of the best, or what was duly advertised as such. When told by a stout, florid man in heavy boots and a large shooting-coat that Mr Meadows had only just started for Copenhagen, Australia, New Orleans, and a few such places, after a runaway clerk from Liverpool, Mr Gudgeons's vexation vented itself in loud expressions of dissatisfaction.

'It's not enough,' he said, 'that I, who never had my pocket picked, am suddenly to become the victim of the most absurd robbery that ever happened to a respectable member of society; but the very best man in London to discover the crime has just gone to the North Pole after an ordinary runaway felon!'

'Well, sir,' said Mr Winks, for that member of the detective firm it was who had answered Mr Gudgeons, 'you needn't put yourself about so. I dare say there's nothing about the case but what I can tackle.'

'Your name, sir, is ——?' inquired Mr Gudgeons.

'Winks, of Meadows and Winks,' returned the junior partner, stopping further questions.

‘Very well,’ said Mr Gudgeons, ‘step into this cab, and come along with me.’

Mr Winks put on his hat, took up a thick stick, and then went to a speaking-tube in the corner of the room.

‘If that murder or that forgery comes in this morning,’ said Mr Winks, up the pipe, ‘I’m gone with a gent for a few hours. Now, sir,’ turning to Mr Gudgeons, ‘I’m at your service.’

This looked business like and unromantic, and so far Mr Gudgeons was satisfied; but he was not favourably disposed to junior partners, though his peculiar position compelled him to accept Mr Winks’s assistance. He stated the case to that gentleman in the cab, and in about half-an-hour they were standing in the nursery of Mr Gudgeons’s family mansion. Everything was much the same as Mr Gudgeons had left it, except that the women, especially Mrs Gudgeons, appeared with very red eyes, and were rather favourably disposed to a supernatural explanation of the mystery. The two boys had perfectly agreed between themselves as to the present condition and prospects of their lost sister. They never for a moment suspected Sarah Finch. They had had their doubts about one Robinson Crusoe, until they considered how he was shut up on an inaccessible island; they had even suspected Sinbad the Sailor, until they recollected he had got quite enough trouble on his own hands without encumbering himself with a stolen baby; and at last they settled upon the old hag of the forest, who was remarkably fond of children, having none of her own. Their youthful imaginations pictured the lost little one lying in a golden cavern, upon a bed of scented leaves, feeding upon large peaches, without a fear of indigestion, listening to the most wonderful musical-box ever heard in this world; and, above all, far away from odious lessons upon population and the statistics of crime.

This was the very natural result of the mysterious robbery, which annoyed Mr Gudgeons the most. He had the proper feelings of a father—at least it is to be presumed so, as his children wanted for nothing which money could purchase; but he also had his theories and opinions to preserve. He hated the romantic—he did not believe in the wonderful; and just as he had begun to flatter himself upon having thoroughly grounded his boys in his own way of thinking, the whole fabric of his pet education was swept away by an occurrence which defied the ordinary rules of explanation.

Mr Winks did not appear to be a person of any very great powers of mind; in fact, his greatest successes (and he had had them, as

well as Mr Meadows) were effected by remaining perfectly passive ; and his reputation (and he had got one, as well as Mr Meadows) was acquired by opening his ears and holding his tongue. He was the representative of a system, very simple in its operation, though sometimes very useful in its results. He waited until somebody came to his office with something to say, and in general he had not to wait very long. The information he bought he sold again at a premium ; and there was little in the working of his trade more wonderful than this.

The unusual character of the robbery he had been called in to investigate rather puzzled Mr Winks, though he was too discreet to betray himself. In conversation he openly treated the supposed mystery as a thing of every-day occurrence ; though, privately, he could not refer it to any class of crime with which his professional experience had made him familiar. He looked round the room, and found no signs of violence, no traces of burglars or burglary. The window (well provided with Mr Gudgeons's favourite alarums) had not been touched ; the lock of the door had not been tampered with ; there were no signs throughout the house of forcible entrance ; and although there was little in the room of any value, nothing had disappeared except the baby. Baby-stealing, when carried on by women—chiefly beggars—in the streets, fell naturally into its appointed place, and did not disturb the harmony of the great criminal system ; but, in its present form, it was a sudden and meteoric appearance ; and Mr Winks, for the present, got out of the difficulty he was in by a very obvious and a very commonplace mode of investigation.

‘ I should like to see the nurse,’ said Mr Winks.

‘ Certainly,’ said Mr Gudgeons, and he ordered Sarah Finch.

Sarah made her appearance, looking very wild and nervous ; both bad symptoms in the mind of Mr Winks.

‘ Have you any followers, Sarah Finch ? ’ asked Mr Winks.

‘ None, sir,’ replied the distressed nurse.

‘ Never had any ? ’ still inquired Mr Winks.

‘ Never, sir,’ still answered the nurse.

‘ Don’t know anything of a sailor, named Tarboy ? ’

‘ No, sir.’

‘ Don’t know anything of a discharged postman, named John Knox ? ’

‘ No ; of course not.’

‘ Don’t know anything of a ticket-of-leave man, No. 4,236—dressed in a grenadier’s uniform ? ’

‘Certainly not,’ replied Sarah Finch, becoming gradually more spirited as she was losing her temper. These men were pure fabrications of the inventive Mr Winks, but in putting such questions he was impressing Mr Gudgeons with a sense of his stores of information, and acting upon the time-honoured traditions of his art.

‘Where were you born?’ asked Mr Winks, continuing his examination.

‘Not a hundred miles from Cambridge,’ returned the badgered nurse, now fully aroused, and partially sulky.

‘Are your parents still living?’

‘Mr Winks,’ said Mr Gudgeons, at this point, feeling that the course the examination was taking reflected upon his own management of his household, ‘I’m happy to say my establishment is not conducted without some order and method; and I have a full record of answers to all these questions you are now putting to that wretched woman.’

This last expression of her master was extremely distasteful to the excited Sarah Finch.

‘Wretched woman, sir, you may well say,’ she said, ‘to have to live in a house and sleep in a room like this. You don’t suppose I’ve eaten the poor dear baby, do you? Give me my long character, and let me go.’

‘Sarah Finch,’ returned Mr Gudgeons, with much dignity and solemnity, ‘leave the room. You will consider yourself in custody until this affair is explained.’

Sarah did as she was ordered, sobbing aloud, for her bursts of spirit were very fitful, and they soon burned out.

Mr Winks looked very solemn, stroked his chin, and shook his head, all of which might mean nothing at all or might mean a great deal.

‘Now, sir,’ said Mr Gudgeons, rather loudly, getting impatient, for with all his weakness he was not a man to be trifled with; ‘what next?’

Mr Winks saw the necessity of earning his money, and he pushed on.

‘There’s a tree outside that window,’ said Mr Winks.

‘Good,’ returned Mr Gudgeons, concisely.

‘Its distance from the wall is—what?’

‘Ten yards,’ replied Mr Gudgeons.

‘It passes over the roof of this outbuilding?’ continued Mr Winks, who had made a survey.

‘It does,’ replied Mr Gudgeons, ‘and the nearest branch that would bear a man’s weight, or even a boy’s, is about fifteen yards in a slightly slanting direction from the roof.’

‘Exactly,’ said Mr Winks; ‘the garden wall, which divides you from the road and a field, is lofty and well protected with broken glass; there are no footsteps traceable in the garden; but still, a rope slung round the nearest branch of that tree would furnish access to the roof; and that once gained, there is an easy road to the room down the broad old chimney.’

‘Good,’ returned Mr Gudgeons.

‘That is the only possible road,’ continued Mr Winks, ‘by which a professional burglar could enter; but, as a man of the world, you must know that professional burglars don’t risk their life and liberty to steal a baby.’

‘Exactly my opinion,’ replied Mr Gudgeons.

‘Very well, then,’ returned Mr Winks; ‘suspicion points strongly to the members of your own household, especially to Sarah Finch.’

‘Where’s her motive for such conduct?’ said Mr Gudgeons.

‘Have you had any words with her lately?’ asked Mr Winks.

‘A few, last night,’ replied Mr Gudgeons, ‘about a trashy book she was reading to my two boys.’

‘Not sufficient for the act, but there’s no accounting for many of these things. Do you feel disposed to give her into formal custody?’

‘No,’ returned Mr Gudgeons, promptly; ‘I certainly do not. My object in applying to you was to avoid publicity. My servants are forbidden to speak of this affair abroad. The child’s lost, and it must be found; but I don’t want to be advertised as the football with whom every thief or madman is at liberty to play. I don’t want my house made a nine-days’ wonder—there’s nothing wonderful in it; nor a hundred people calling upon me under pretence of condolence, but, in reality, only to satisfy their curiosity.’

‘There’s only one course, then, left open,’ said Mr Winks.

‘What’s that?’ asked Mr Gudgeons.

‘I must advertise, in my own way, and wait.’



PART III.



THE most dreary, dismal spots upon earth, either in summer or in winter, but especially on a gloomy, drizzling November day, are those bits of hopelessly waste ground in a thoroughly low neighbourhood, in the heart or the outskirts of the metropolis. Whether they are open and unprotected, or walled in with a few boards, and even placarded as 'To Let,' they are all so marvellously alike, considering the materials of which they are composed, that the faithful picture of one may stand as the model of them all. They are the resting-places of rubbish; the cemeteries of things which still retain some shadowy spirit of humanity, although they are now worthless, even to the rag-picker or the tramp. There is always that wretched, mouldy upper-leather of a shoe, whose sole has parted from it for ever in the weary pilgrimage of life; there are always those old, weird, rotten, battered saucepans, that look like hats—and those equally miserable, discarded, tattered hats, that look like the old saucepans; there is always that piece of an old straw bonnet, surrounded by a number of large thick oyster-shells, pieces of white gleaming china, and pieces of blue willow-pattern plates; there are always a few dust-heaps, fragments of ginger-beer bottles and broken glass, lumps of rain-rotted placards, a little rank grass, the sole of a child's boot, and a dead dog and cat. The effect is dismal: for we see nothing amongst the worn-out, useless, discarded fragments but what has, at one time, been the faithful servant or the chosen companion of man.

Along the border of a waste of this kind, not far from the river, and in a crowded part of the metropolis, called Deadman's Fields, was a line of low houses—almost huts—inhabited by a population of a half-savage, dangerous nature. Their existence was a disgrace; their source of living was rather guessed at than known; their bodies were strong, though the food they ate was coarse, the water they drank was foul, and the air they breathed was worse than impure; they were ignorant in book-knowledge, had never heard of Lord Brougham and the 'Penny Magazine,' but their intellects were keen, and they made their influence felt. Social reformers talked a good deal about them—and that was all. At a time of general disease, a bricklayer-missionary was sent by a public board with a pail of whitewash to purify their homes; and his ear sometimes detected the clink of gold in places where the children seemed to be hungering for bread.

There was no equality—even here. Some were ambitious, flew high, fell, or became distinguished amongst their fellows. Others plodded on in mean, obscure paths, all chosen for the same reason—living without work; all leading to the same end—the jail.

In one of these houses or huts, at this time, there lived a man named Dick Muzzle, who was no better than his neighbours, and no worse. His original name was Dick Turpin Muzzle, given him by his parents in admiration of the immortal highwayman; but, as Dick did not come up to the expectations of his family and friends, the ‘Turpin’ got by degrees obliterated from his name, and he was simply known, at last, as Dick Muzzle.

Dick, being of weak heart, though of strong body, had for a long time occupied a position equally suspended between the criminal and the sporting world. Sometimes he trained dogs for fighting and other amusing purposes; at others, he stole dogs for sale and other profitable purposes. By degrees, however, the sporting world altered, and proved unkind. Dick’s fashionable patrons (and he once had many, who went from the dog-pit to the boudoir or drawing-room) dropped off, one by one, perhaps under an improved tone of public humanity, perhaps in search of another hobby; and Dick, at last, was thrown for subsistence upon an undivided profession. If any compiler of a London Directory had asked Dick’s calling now, he would have been answered ‘dog fancier,’ which means, a person who fancies every dog of any value that ever comes in his way.

Dick Muzzle, notwithstanding his great social abasement, had found a woman willing to become his lawful wedded wife; and the fruit of this marriage was two boys, who were now respectively about seven and eight years of age.

The home of these children had always been the streets and the piece of waste land before their father’s house. They were thin and ill-clad; they were dirty and untaught; but they were active as deer; their eyes were sharp and bright as rats’ eyes; they had strong wills for such children, nerve, courage, and keen watchfulness, and knowledge of the world—such a world as they saw every day of their lives. Night or day, they went where they liked, did what they liked; no one questioned them, no one restrained them. Sometimes they tumbled by the sides of omnibuses, rolling round like wheels, coming on their bare feet with a loud smack, and scanning the faces of the outside passengers in an instant from end to end, with the actions of monkeys and the eyes of weasels. Sometimes they held horses; sometimes they raked in the river mud at low water for what

they could find; sometimes they fought like terriers for money thrown to them by passengers over one of the bridges. They were known in the neighbourhood as Old Mudlark and Young Mudlark, although there was very little difference between them, either in size, activity, or intelligence.

They had occasionally assisted their father in his business, but not to any extent, as they possessed too much life to settle down so early in the tame pursuit of dog-stealing. They knew the breed, nature, and value of dogs, and they knew what a good dog meant in the home of their childhood. It meant meat, potatoes, beer, gin, and generally a comfortable state of things; no dog meant no meat, no potatoes, no beer, no gin, and generally a very uncomfortable state of things. Therefore they saw the importance of dogs; and this was logic, though they had not learned it in the schools.

For some few days past it had been no dog in Dick Muzzle's establishment, and things were looking rather gloomy. There were two old bull-terriers up-stairs, but they were kept as decoys, and they were wholly unsaleable, if their master had even attempted to part with them. There was no other property available for realization in Dick's house, as a glance round the place would have shown to any observer. There were only two rooms, one above, one below. The street-door opened into the sitting-room, disclosing an old turn-up bedstead, four Windsor chairs, a deal table, a ragged mat, a few other necessary articles of no value, and a smoky picture of the cock-pit at Westminster. The upper room was reached through a trap-door in the corner, by a pair of movable steps, and when reached it only showed a very dirty, wretched sleeping-apartment. There were several dogs'-houses and the two bull-terriers in this room; and the trap-door closed down, so that you could stand upon it with perfect safety.

Dick Muzzle came down-stairs about nine o'clock in the morning of the sixth day on which there had been no dog, and sat moodily smoking his pipe over an empty grate, with both his feet on the fender, and his elbows upon his knees. He did not notice that both the brothers Mudlark were out; and if he had, he would not have known whether they had been away all night, or had started early in the morning. The general habits of the house were not those of a well-regulated family.

Dick Muzzle had been sitting smoking and ruminating in this position perhaps about half-an-hour, when the head of his youngest born, Young Mudlark, was thrust in watchfully at the door, and withdrawn again in an instant, with animal rapidity. There was

meaning in this, as was soon shown; for in another few minutes the same young outcast bounded into the room, with bare feet and the agility of an acrobat.

‘Come hout, yer warmin’,’ said Dick Muzzle, who was not in a humour to be trifled with. Young Mudlark made no reply, except by turning a Catherine-wheel hand-spring across the room, and before the father could make up his mind what this conduct deserved, the eldest of the two young Mudlarks made his appearance at the door, with a bundle done up in a small thick blanket.

‘Halloo!’ said the father, ‘what game d’ye call this?’

‘A babby,’ replied the eldest Mudlark, with some pride, while the youngest performed the most extravagant antics in his unbounded delight.

‘A what?’ said the father, putting down his pipe, and opening his eyes in astonishment.

‘A babby,’ repeated the eldest born, nursing up his burthen. Mrs Muzzle had by this time come down the steps from the bed-room loft, and had joined the family group.

‘Where’d you get it?’ she asked, taking the bundle from her son.

‘Found it, o’ coorse,’ said both the Mudlarks, in chorus.

‘Where’d you get it?’ repeated the father, loudly.

‘Prigg’d it from a p’ram’later, then,’ returned the elder, sulkily.

‘How d’ye mean?’ said the father, not understanding the term.

‘From a young-un’s shay, then,’ replied the eldest Mudlark, in explanation.

‘Oh!’ said Dick Muzzle, drawing a breath of relief.

There was a short pause in the conversation at this point, during which Mrs Muzzle, who was a mother herself, opened the blanket, and found a genteel, healthy, sleeping female child, about a twelve-month old.

‘What am I to do wi’ a babby?’ asked Dick Muzzle, vacantly, his intellect not being very quick to perceive the profit of any new source of crime that was brought before him.

‘You know, fast enough,’ said the eldest Mudlark, sharply; ‘a babby’s better nor a dog, aint it? A gent gives five pund for ’is dog; o’ coorse he’ll guv more for his babby, won’t he?’

This business-like statement altered Dick Muzzle’s manner at once, and he could not conceal his admiration for the talent of his firstborn.

‘Eh?’ he said, turning to Mrs Muzzle, with a gratified twinkle

in his eye, and pointing with his thumb over his shoulder to the eldest Mudlark, 'he aint a bad sort, is he? He knows a thing or two!'

The infant that had found its way, thus far without injury, into the bosom of the Muzzle family was the lost baby—Miss Elizabeth, or Bessy, Gudgeons. The story about the perambulator was of course false; but as neither Mr nor Mrs Muzzle seemed to doubt it, the two outcast boys preserved their secret. In whatever way they had got at the child, their motive for stealing it was clearly conveyed in their own words. The home of their childhood was suffering under adversity for want of a good dog. A good dog they had not found, but they had discovered a respectable baby, and a respectable baby, they reasoned, must be equal to several good dogs. This, again, was logic, though they had not learned it in the schools.

There is some little pride lingering in the hearts of even the very lowest specimens of humanity; and Mrs Muzzle's boast was that she herself was a mother. Social reformers, looking at her two boys, might, perhaps, have thought it would have been better for society, if she had not been so productive. The maternal instinct, however, in this case had its beneficial use, for it procured a large degree of careful attention for little Bessy Gudgeons. When the child woke up it was very hungry and it ate some coarse bread and water, made into a rude pap, with a relish that would have astonished Sarah Finch; and the finishing touch was put to the process of its weaning in a way that poor Mrs Gudgeons had never dreamed of. A comfortable bed was made for the child (chiefly of straw) in a large dog's-house upstairs, which had once been the habitation, and was now sacred to the memory, of 'Black-nosed Billy,' the most celebrated fighting-dog of his day. Mrs Muzzle considered it a perfect palace of a cradle—there is no accounting for taste. The two old bull-terriers whined and whistled with satisfaction when they saw the preparations being made for a new companion; and little Bessy Gudgeons seemed to be very well satisfied with her quarters, and also with her new nurse.

While Mrs Muzzle was busy, Dick Muzzle was not idle; and the first thing he did was to send the youngest Mudlark for the 'doctor.' This did not mean that any one was ill, but only that the services of a particular man in that particular criminal community were required. Criminals are like a good many other classes of society: they have talent, but they want capital. Their gains are precarious, and they have a tendency to outlive their means, in which position they

pledge the proceeds of the next robbery, before they are actually realized.

The doctor for whom Dick Muzzle had sent was a capitalist in the confined sense of the term, and a man who could read, and write, and cipher. His acquirements were in active demand in every negotiation requiring any share of literary knowledge; and his money was quite as much in demand for small loans, based upon securities of a not very marketable nature.

The doctor's transactions with Dick Muzzle were very simple. When a good dog was found, the doctor was called in to advance a small sum in proportion to the value of the animal. This he invariably did at a high rate of interest, reserving to himself the right of superintending its restitution to its rightful owner, and of receiving the reward and paying himself very handsomely out of the money for his pains. The modern system of usury could not have been better understood by the doctor if he had been a lawyer and a money-lender, practising in the most refined circles.

The doctor was called in to look at the baby, and the two young Mudlarks were sharply on the watch, for they believed in the doctor much more than they did in their own father. They saw him always well-dressed, always handling money, never in trouble, never taken into custody, like some of their neighbours; and the boys never lost an opportunity of listening to what he said, in the hope of discovering the secret of his prosperity. The doctor had assisted at too many varieties of crime to be astonished at being asked to lend money upon a stolen baby. He examined the child with an experienced eye, and soon satisfied himself of its grade and quality. The few questions he put to the two boys (who consistently maintained their story about the perambulator) confirmed his impression. He spoke confidentially to Dick Muzzle at the door, and the quick eye of the eldest Mudlark detected the glitter of several sovereigns passing from the doctor's hand to his father's. The quick ear of the eldest Mudlark also heard the doctor say something about 'properly managing the child, so as to produce a hundred pounds;' and it made a deep impression upon his youthful and imaginative mind.

The bargain was sealed, and the infant daughter of Mr Gudgeons—Mr Gudgeons, who had money in the funds, a good banker's balance, and unencumbered landed property besides—was mortgaged in a low hovel by an operation between two individuals, one being a professional dog-stealer, and the other being the dog-stealer's patron, adviser, and friend.

PART IV.



WHEN Mr Winks returned to his office, he at once caused it to be intimated, through the channels at his command, that he was prepared to purchase a baby. He also drew up an advertisement, couched in vague and mysterious terms, and inserted in curious, out-of-the-way publications, wherein he stated that for a female child, with two teeth and a fair complexion, whose age did not exceed eleven months or one year, he could give a certain number of sterling pounds.

Mr Winks was an old-established family-man, but still he wanted another baby !

Many applications were made to Mr Winks in the course of the next day, which he waited at home to receive, and at last he became possessed of the right communication. A respectable man called upon him, all alone, saw him all alone, and said he thought he could provide him with a baby exactly like the one he required. An appointment was made for the following afternoon : the time, four o'clock ; the place, 'the good dry skittle-ground' of the 'Beau Brummell' public-house, Mire Street, Deadman's Fields.

Mr Winks immediately acquainted Mr Gudgeons with this arrangement, according to orders ; for the latter gentleman still had his doubts about trusting entirely to a junior partner, and he insisted upon taking an active part at every important step in this very troublesome and peculiar business. Mr Winks would have preferred conducting this negotiation himself, but Mr Gudgeons, as usual, had determined to have his own way, and Mr Winks was compelled to humour him.

At four o'clock in the afternoon of the next day (the second from the one on which the child had disappeared), Mr Gudgeons, well supplied with metallic currency for a ready-money transaction, proceeded, in company with Mr Winks, to buy back his lost child from the hands of the dangerous classes.

It was a pity that Mr Gudgeons had thrust himself forward in this matter, for he was, of all men, the least adapted to treat it with the unprejudiced coolness it required. He could not be made to understand why he was to appear as the purchaser of an infant, and not as a fierce, foaming, injured father, loudly demanding the restitution of his stolen child.

‘A gang of ruffians—a pack of scoundrels!’ he shouted in the cab, as they reached their place of destination. ‘There, sir! I tell you what I’d do if I was a magistrate: I’d transport every man that dared to live in such a blackguard neighbourhood!’

‘My dear sir,’ said Mr Winks, calmly, ‘you must really command your temper, or you will spoil all.’

They got out of the cab at the ‘Beau Brummell,’ a low dingy public-house, not far from Dick Muzzle’s dwelling, and they were received by a respectable-looking man, who seemed prepared for their arrival. This was the ‘doctor,’ and the same person who had called upon Mr Winks on the day before.

The place was repulsive in appearance, with an ill-stocked bar, and a strong smell of beer and sawdust; but still Mr Gudgeons felt no fear, and insisted, much against Mr Winks’s wish, upon going *himself* through the interview with the man or men in the skittle-ground. This expressed determination a little altered the plans of the doctor. If Mr Winks had conducted the negotiation in person for the return of the stolen baby, the doctor would have appeared as the representative of Dick Muzzle; but as Mr Gudgeons was about to take Mr Winks’s position, Mr Winks would require looking after during the interview by a competent person; and this very necessary task the doctor undertook to perform, while Dick Muzzle met the decisive Mr Gudgeons.

The skittle-ground was of course at the back of the house, and approached by two back-ways, or alleys, which came up to its single door almost at a right angle with each other. At the entrance to both these courts a man was standing, as if by accident, while the doctor took up his post with Mr Winks, guarding the approach from the house. When Mr Gudgeons entered the skittle-ground—a kind of place he had never been in before in his life—Dick Muzzle affected to be earnestly employed in solving some intricate problem with two pins, a ball, and two pieces of dead-wood.

‘Now, then,’ said Mr Gudgeons, very testily; ‘my time’s valuable.’

‘Oh!’ said Dick Muzzle, looking up from the ground, though he had before examined Mr Gudgeons; ‘you’re the gent as wants to buy a babby!’

‘Go on,’ replied Mr Gudgeons, commanding his temper with much difficulty.

‘What might be yer notions now about the price of a hinfant?’ inquired Dick Muzzle, looking artfully at Mr Gudgeons.

If Mr Gudgeons had consulted his own taste, he would have said,

'A horsewhip;' but he restrained himself, by a great effort, in obedience to Mr Winks's instructions, and replied, 'Ten pounds.'

'Ten pund!' said Dick Muzzle, with a smile of contempt, 'why, I'd gi' more for a dog—a mongrel! If I'd got a nice female hinfant, wi' light 'air an' blue eyes, about a year old—mind, I never sed I 'ad—I should want a tidy sight more for it nor ten pund—ah, nor yet fifty!'

'You rascal!' exclaimed Mr Gudgeons, now fully enraged, and advancing with a threatening air towards Dick Muzzle, 'do you dare to trifle with my feelings as a father?'

'Come,' returned Dick Muzzle, putting himself in a defensive attitude; 'it's no huse your quarrellin' wi' me, 'cos two can play at that game. I don't know anythin' habout fathers, nor yet mothers. You come to me to buy a hinfant—werry well; p'r'aps I've got one to sell—p'r'aps I aint.'

This oration was stopped by the appearance of Mrs Muzzle, who beckoned her husband to the door of the skittle-ground.

'It's gone!' she said, in a quick, nervous whispering tone.

'What's gone?' asked Dick Muzzle, who required full particulars of everything.

'The baby—the child,' replied Mrs Muzzle; 'the two boys must 'av run away wi' it agen, while my back was turned.'

'Come,' said Mr Gudgeons, interrupting this conversation, 'I can't be trifled with in this manner. Give me the child, and name your price.'

'I aint got no child,' returned Dick Muzzle, rather bewildered by what his wife had told him; 'I never sed I 'ad.'

This was too much for Mr Gudgeons, and he immediately sought the advice of Mr Winks outside. It was getting dusk, and it was necessary to act at once. Mr Winks never expected that Mr Gudgeons, without assistance, would bring the negotiation to a successful close: but when Dick Muzzle persisted in declaring that he had no baby to sell, and never said he had, and the doctor (who had been informed of the disappearance of the child), when appealed to, merely shook his head, even Mr Winks was fairly puzzled, though he did not think proper to admit it. Mr Gudgeons threw no additional light upon the mystery by relating the appearance of the woman, Mrs Muzzle (who came and went along one of the back alleys); and Mr Winks decided that there was nothing in this sudden change of tactics but a desire to extort a higher price for the child.

'You know me,' said Mr Winks to the doctor and Dick Muzzle,

‘and you know my office. My friend is determined to buy a baby, and he won’t give more for it than fifty pounds. It’s now five o’clock, and we shall both return to my office, where we shall wait until ten o’clock. If no one fetches us to buy a baby for fifty pounds by that hour, we shall have to go elsewhere—you understand.’

Mr Gudgeons had, by this time, become a good deal more passive, though he could not yet understand why everybody was not given into custody; and he got into the cab with Mr Winks, and they both drove rapidly away. Dick Muzzle and the doctor also went their way together; the former denouncing the two unruly Mudlarks in no very recordable terms; the latter bewailing the loss of the five pounds which he had advanced upon the security of the missing baby.

PART V.



THE eldest of the two Mudlarks had become an altered out-cast from the moment he had heard the doctor say that little Bessy Gudgeons, if properly managed, would produce from her parents the almost fabulous sum of a hundred pounds. He had never supposed a baby could be worth that amount to anybody, knowing how little his parents would give for him and his brother if they were lost. The money seemed so tempting—so inexhaustible—so much more capable than a score of good dogs of producing stores of meat, potatoes, beer, and gin, that the eldest Mudlark confided in his brother, and together they resolved to attempt to procure the reward. What was meant by the phrase ‘if properly managed,’ they could not clearly understand, but they never doubted their power of making a bargain with the anxious parents for restoring the lost child. The money, whatever they got, would be their own, without their having to share it with the doctor, or anybody else. They had stolen the child, therefore the child was theirs; why should the artful, comfortable doctor have any share in it? why should they not have it all? This was logic, though they had not learned it in the schools.

For the best part of three days they had exerted themselves, without success, to find the exact position of Mr Gudgeons’s house. They had a rather peculiar chart to guide them, which they could not very easily trace. They saw so many dwellings, each one of which might be the right one, that they were rather embarrassed in their choice. As a chance of obtaining a hundred pounds was not a

thing to throw away upon a mistake, they determined upon what appeared the only safe method, that of retracing their steps over the same road they had come the other night, or rather morning, with the child. Having decided upon this plan, they watched their opportunity, when their mother was out, took the child—which had been left in their charge, and which was quietly sleeping in the house of the late ‘Black-nosed Billy’—wrapped it up in its little blanket, as before, and with some food, which they judged would be acceptable to all upon the journey, they went their way unobserved.

A curious and a most unexpected way it was:—round the dreary waste ground, along some wretched streets and alleys, over a broad road, and up another street, which, from having new and lofty but tenantless houses at the beginning, gradually dwindled into a lane of boardings, plastered with staring placards, ending at last in a long, broad, open misty waste of land, bounded by distant factories, and having many fag-ends of streets running into it upon arches from the sides. It was now nearly dark, but the two Mudlarks knew every inch of the ground, and with sure, quick feet, and unshaken nerves, they pushed on their way with the still sleeping child. Desert as the place seemed, it was more familiar to the young outcasts than their own home, and they felt an animal gratification as they bounded over the hillocks, and along the edges of deep pits, safe from any pursuit, if their flight had even been traced. They stopped, at last, under some arches near the extremity of one of those unformed, barely-outlined side-streets, that showed little prospect of being warmed into life for half a century to come. Here, feeling along the wall until he came to a loose brick, the youngest Mudlark, who was not carrying the baby, drew out an old bull’s-eyed lantern, containing an oil-wick, which he lighted with a match from a box he carried in his cap. Passing again out of this arch, they kept along the line, with the face of their lantern closed, until they came to the tenth arch from the one where they first stopped. Entering this archway, they went to its furthest end, when, taking the guard from their lantern, they removed some more loose bricks from the bottom of the wall, until an opening was made large enough for a thin boy to creep underneath. When they had first discovered this opening in their wanderings it was as they made it now; the closing in with loose bricks had been a precaution suggested to keep it private, if possible, to themselves. The youngest Mudlark first worked his way through this hole, legs foremost, dropping into a place which just allowed his small weasel face to peep through the hole. The sleeping baby was

pushed through to him, like a baking into an oven, and the eldest Mudlark quickly followed with the lantern, closing up the hole with the bricks, which had been placed within his reach. Leaving the baby in the arms of his brother, he kept the lantern, and went on first to light and direct the way.

There was nothing wonderful—as Mr Gudgeons would have said, if he had been there—in the place they were exploring, and had often explored before. It was no magician's cave; no passage leading to an enchanted castle—as Mr Gudgeons would have been delighted to find, if he had been there—but simply a new, dry, unused branch sewer, leading into one of the great mains that run down to the river. The two Mudlarks had often been up these mains from the river entrance at low water, searching for any treasures in the shape of spoons and forks that careless kitchen-maids might have washed down the pipes. They were more familiar with the ebb and flow of the tide, the floodings, the passages, the small veins and chief arteries of this great underground system, than with the world above. This was the hidden chart they had been trying to trace back in their three days' endeavours on the surface to find Mr Gudgeons's house. Along this dark and perilous route they had brought the unconscious infant on the morning of its disappearance from its father's comfortable dwelling; and they were now retracing their steps with the same burden, their minds full of the designs and hopes of children, their thin, weak bodies governed by the hearts and nerves of premature men.

Their course was not without many windings and passages to be selected, and it was some time before they came to the tunnel of the great main which they had to cross. The child still slept—the motion favouring its rest—and their attention was not therefore drawn from their route. Although they were on a high level from the river—although the sewer they were at present traversing had never been used, and was at some distance above the height at which water generally reached in the great main, the two Mudlarks noticed the very unusual circumstance of wet being under their feet. At last they reached the great main, which they knew they were approaching by the increased coldness and current of the air, and the loud gurgling sound of running water. When the eldest Mudlark came to the opening, he motioned his brother back, while he glanced up and down the huge, slimy tunnel, throwing his light on the top and down the opposite side, displaying the damp glistening walls, and measuring with his eye the depth of water at the bottom.

The survey was satisfactory, for, placing the lamp on the edge of the brickwork, he went down on his chest, and allowed himself to slip gradually over, and drop into the water—nearly two feet deep—beneath. The baby was only got down by the youngest Mudlark leaning through into the tunnel, and dropping it into the outstretched arms of his brother. The motion shook it, although the eldest Mudlark, standing almost to his waist in water, carried round his arms with it as it fell, to break the jerk of its fall. It gave a few restless, whining cries, but was soon hushed once more into silence. The youngest Mudlark then dropped into the main sewer in the same way as his brother, and the lantern was pulled down by a string which hung attached to it, and dexterously caught, without shaking out a drop of its oil.

Here, then, they were at last, in the broad, dark, echoing main sewer, up to their waists in mud and water; two children and an infant, the latter happily unconscious of its peculiar position; the former fortunately being little men of the world—the world beneath their feet. The two young Masters Gudgeons—as near as possible the same age as the two young Mudlarks—would have been sorely put to it in the same situation; and yet, in the eyes of social reformers, the two former boys would represent education; the two latter, dark, stunted ignorance. Heart, courage, decision, will, nerves, self-reliance, go for nought; the two Mudlarks would have been considered ignorant, because they had learned nothing in the schools.

Walking along the side of the tunnel for some distance up the sewer, with the moisture dropping on their heads, and on the blanket in which the child was warmly bound, the two Mudlarks at last stopped at a known mark on the wall, at which point they crossed over the thick stream. The water in the middle of the sewer was deeper than at the sides, though not quite so thick; and the infant had to be carried on the head of the eldest Mudlark, like a basket of fruit. When they had effected the passage of this black river, they kept on their way for some distance up the other side, until they came to a broad opening, high up in the wall.

At this juncture, the hitherto amiable and passive Bessy Gudgeons began to cry, and her nurse—the youngest Mudlark—after rocking her to and fro in a very wild and excited fashion, suggested an oyster-shell to amuse her, as he had seen a host of infants amused, for hours together, upon the dismal waste in Deadman's Fields. The eldest Mudlark thought food was the best thing, and his judgment seemed to be right; for after stuffing her mouth with the piece of the bread

they had brought with them, chewed into a pulpy ball, much larger than a full-sized walnut, the young lady for a time was pacified.

Poor Mr Gudgeons, at this moment, was impatiently pacing the office of Mr Winks, in a highly-fretful state of mind, listening for the messenger from Dick Muzzle, who, Mr Winks predicted, would arrive long before the hour fixed on as the limit. If he could have seen the present position of his stolen child there can be little doubt that his impatience would have developed into violent madness; and even the clever Mr Winks would scarcely have known what course to take to effect the rescue of the lost little one.

The opening in the wall, before which the two Mudlarks had stopped, was the outlet of an old sewer that had been disused for some years, the present active channels being constructed in another direction. To reach this opening, which was a necessary part of their journey, they went through a performance similar to that which had enabled them to gain the entrance of the new sewer on the other side, on the morning when they came through with the child. The young Mudlark, who held the infant, took up a firm position near the wall, and the eldest stepped first upon the calf of his leg, then on to his left hip, then on to his shoulders. The child was then conveyed carefully to the upper Mudlark, and when they felt themselves secure, the whole human fabric stood upright, like acrobats in the circus, with little Bessy Gudgeons at the top, the eldest Mudlark in the centre, the youngest Mudlark at the base. This position enabled them to reach the opening of the old sewer with ease; and the child was first safely deposited at the side—like a bundle upon an out-of-the-way shelf—then the upper Mudlark left his brother's shoulders, leaned on the edge of the sewer, grasping a hole made in the floor of the brickwork with both hands, while his legs hung over into the main tunnel; and, finally, the lower Mudlark seized those legs with his hands, ran up the wall like a cat, grasping his brother in his progress, until he reached the top, and they were all safely landed in the branch passage. Here again they noticed, as in the new sewer on the other side, a quantity of wet and mud, which they could not account for, the tunnel being generally dry.

Their road was now more broken and uneven, and more winding and angular in its course. The child having tasted of food which was extremely unpalatable, went to sleep again, perhaps in disgust at its treatment. The eldest Mudlark, who still went on first with the lantern, threw the light, from time to time, upon the roof and walls, showing how old the brick-work was, and how, in many places, it had

fallen down, leaving nothing at the sides but bare earth and clay. When they had pursued this old tunnel for some distance, they came upon a sudden and abrupt descent, which was not a constructed incline, but a pit caused by an underground landslip. To their right, very high up, was a large gaping mouth of a main tunnel (now also disused), leading direct on a dead level to the river, which flowed at no great distance. So far the two Mudlarks had explored no underground world that was not, or might not have been, familiar to any other mudlarks of industry and perseverance. But the two young outcasts had got a secret, and they were not far from the place where the secret was carefully concealed.

Nearly opposite the gaping mouth of the old main tunnel, at the foot of the earthen wall—for brickwork it could no longer be called—was a small depressed oval hole, neatly filled up by the two Mudlarks with old rubbish and clay. When first made, it was no doubt a rat-hole, and it had probably been gradually washed out, larger and larger, by the action of the water when it passed in and out of the old river sewer. This hole had been discovered, almost in its present state, by the eldest Mudlark, when raking with his brother in the sewers, early on the very night on which young Bessy Gudgeons disappeared; and it was intimately connected with her mysterious abduction. The eldest Mudlark—always of an animal, inquisitive turn of mind—had on that occasion stooped down, putting his lantern through first and his head afterwards. He was not afraid of rats, however large and fierce, for he had seen too many of them from childhood upwards. He used to play with them like kittens, in the days of his father's prosperity, when 'Black-nosed Billy,' the celebrated dog, was alive and fighting, and rats were supplied in scores by Dick Muzzle, for matches amongst the nobility and gentry. The light of the lantern, instead of revealing an ordinary rat-hole, showed the eldest Mudlark a passage running in two slanting directions, right and left, and it was not long before he wriggled himself through, his brother very quickly following him. First they went to the left, but were soon stopped by a barrier of earth, which had evidently blocked up that outlet by falling in during some road-making, or other similar operation, in the world above. Quickly retracing their steps, they came to the point of starting, and then struck off in the other direction. Here they went for some short distance down a slight incline, and then up another slight and long incline, until they arrived at a dry earthen vault, the floor of which was a soft gravelly sand. On one side only of this vault there was a brick wall, seemingly very thick, and

having a small arched doorway, the door of which had broken from its rusty hinges, worn with age, and had fallen on the floor of the vault. Under this archway was a winding flight of narrow brick steps, running up the centre of the wall, and ending on a small square platform, two sides of which were still the wall, and the other side (on the right of the steps as you ascended) was a thick oaken partition, containing an iron handle, and secured with a heavy iron bar.

There was the mystery explained of the stolen child. The two Mudlarks, on their former visit, had removed this bar with some little difficulty, and taking hold of the iron handle, they had found it governing a sliding panel, which moved easily and silently under the slightest touch. They had entered a large cupboard recess, and going through two doors, they found a large dark room (no other than Mr Gudgeons's nursery), and by the light of the moon, which came through the old arched window, they discovered that it was furnished almost as scantily as their own humble home. Looking behind the curtains of the other recess (it was in the dead of the night), they found Sarah Finch in a very heavy slumber, and the infant sleeping almost as soundly in the little iron cot by her side. It was the eldest Mudlark who gazed more particularly upon this picture; and the idea (which he afterwards developed to his father) came suddenly across his mind, that a baby must be a good deal more valuable to its possessors than a dog. It is true he had seen babies knocked and thrown about in Deadman's Fields, and dogs too, for the matter of that; but this house was in another neighbourhood, wherever it happened to stand; and the eldest Mudlark, without further hesitation, stole the baby in its blanket. The young burglars, at that instant, fancying they heard a noise outside the room door, glided softly and quickly, with their bare feet, to their secret passage in the recess, closed the panel after them, and put up the bar with great exertion, retracing their steps in the same direction as they came.

This ancient portion of Mr Gudgeons's family mansion had once been an honoured part of another spacious mansion, standing alone in the fields during those fine old troublesome times (entirely ignored by Mr Gudgeons) when Charles I. was either king or recently had been. Down that narrow secret staircase in the wall, under that vault, and along that falling and rising passage, many an anxious wife or mother had conveyed some hunted Cavalier husband or son, while the furious Roundheads were battering at the outer gate. Now this historically-romantic passage, which in those days came up in a peaceful orchard,

far away across the fields, had had its ancient outlet rudely destroyed by clumsy navigators forming a public road; while rats had been busy in paving the way for Mudlarks to turn its venerable channel into the commonest of our common sewers. The Roundheads and the Cavaliers had long been lying side by side in their graves; but their places were supplied by two youthful, muddy, book-ignorant, half-animal outcasts, winding down the old passage with a stolen baby, into the regions of dirt and filth.

The design of the two Mudlarks, in coming back over this ground, had now taken shape and form. They had food and a light, if it should be found necessary to stop through the night. The eldest, leaving the child in the care of his brother in the vault, hoped to get through the panel, and thence unobserved through the house, learning by this means, without dangerous inquiries, the exact dwelling from which they had taken the infant. Then his plan was to come back and knock at the door (which he hoped to do before the family retired to bed), make an offer to the anxious parents to become the revealer of a secret and the restorer of the lost baby, and earn by this means a handsome reward, punctually paid in advance. In the event of foul play, which he did not apprehend, young as he was, he had fully arranged the plan of escape. Only one person was to be admitted to the nursery, and the door locked. The child was then to be brought up at a given signal, and placed through the panel in the recess cupboard, the doors of which were to be closed, with him inside. Then, at another signal, the doors were to be opened by the person admitted into the nursery, by which time both he and his brother would have made their way along the passage with the reward, and would have got through the old rat-hole into the old network of sewers, where no one would ever follow them, except outcasts like themselves.

This was the scheme—at once child-like, elaborate, and courageous.

It was now about nine o'clock at night, and they were safe with the child in the dry vault under Mr Gudgeons's dwelling. Mr Gudgeons and Mr Winks were still seated in Mr Winks's office; the latter gentleman getting nervous, the former gentleman thoroughly out of temper.

PART VI.



R GUDGEON'S family mansion, since the peculiar robbery, was not like the same dwelling. Mr Gudgeons was restless, forgetful of his pet domestic system, and constantly hovering about Mr Winks's office. Mrs Gudgeons had been taken nervously ill, and had been ordered by the family doctor to seek change of scene. She had gone to stay with her mother. Sarah Finch was told to consider herself in custody, and she did so. She imprisoned herself in the servant's bed-room up-stairs, and she would not come down even to take her meals. She was heard to say that bread and water were quite good enough for such as she, who had lost their character and their master's and mistress's confidence.

The nursery was avoided by every one in the house, except the two Masters Gudgeons and James Ross, the gardener and general man-servant. If Mr Gudgeons could have heard one-half of the wonderful stories current in his household concerning this room, he would have committed arson, and burned the whole establishment to the ground.

If any two boys ever disgraced themselves and their father's careful teaching, they were undoubtedly the two Masters Gudgeons. The loss of their sister, after the first decent burst of affliction was over, had increased their appetite for the marvellous to such an extent that their conduct was fearful to behold.

Nothing was too strong for them in the shape of romance; and they had inspired such rebellious confidence in the minds of the servants, that whole sets of ragged saffron-coloured novels, written by walking nightmares, and illustrated by maniacs drawing from models on the rack, were brought boldly forth from clothes-chests where they had long been hidden, and read by flickering candles, bought out of the servants' own wages. Old hags of the forest, and unscrupulous counts with voices of thunder, had long fallen into deserved contempt; and the fiction stomach of the two boys especially was so cloyed with the wonderful and supernatural, that nothing short of a pickled vampire seemed capable of exciting their diseased palates.

On this particular evening, about eight o'clock (while Mr Gudgeons was fuming in Mr Winks's office, and the two Mudlarks were slinking up the sewers), James Ross, the man-servant, had brought

home a book, lent him by a gentleman's coachman in the neighbourhood, and recommended to him as a 'regular stunner.'

'You see, Master Harry,' said James to the eldest of his young masters, 'it aint got any o' them ghosts and demons in it, which we've heerd so much on lately, although it seems to 'ave; but hevery thing comes hout right at last, and turns hout to be a hold man who's bin playin' hup a nice game in a castle wi' trap doors, an' all that kind o' thing.'

Master Harry (to whom the book was presented, as being generally the established reader to the group) did not seem at first to relish the description of the plot, but after a little persuasion he was prevailed upon to taste it. A fresh candle was set up, and they drew round the fire (they were in a kind of butler's pantry, a room on a level with the kitchen), Master Harry reading aloud, while Master Tom and James Ross listened.

The book was certainly not a literary production of which a nation might be proud; but its vices were vices of taste—its virtues were virtues of morality. The right man was *always* in the right place; the wrong man—nowhere. There was an army of characters, who came and went as they thought proper; there was incident piled on incident, without any tracts or sermons being artfully conveyed in the chapters; and there was an ingeniously-constructed castle that figured very prominently in the book, as full of mechanical tricks as a china-shop in a pantomime. Its title was 'The Bleeding Baron of Barnet.' Master Harry warmed up considerably as he got further into the story, and at last pronounced it to be 'jolly and glorious.'

They had been reading and listening, perhaps for nearly an hour, when they came upon a passage that caused the eldest Master Gudgeons to pause: it was an elaborate and vivid description of a sliding-panel in the wall of an old oaken closet.

'Now, then!' said young Tom Gudgeons, impatiently—'what are you stopping for?'

'That's it!' said Master Harry, throwing down the book, and starting up, full of the value of a great discovery.

'What's the matter, Master Harry?' inquired James.

'That's it!' again shouted the eldest Master Gudgeons. 'A sliding panel; that's how little Bessy was stolen; it's in the nursery!'

James could not believe that anything was ever built in a common house like it was in a romantic castle; and he endeavoured to persuade his young master against harbouring such an idea. But Master Harry had some little dash of the obstinacy—call it decision—of his

father, and he would not read another line until a full examination had been made of the walls, and particularly of the old recesses, in the nursery.

James was obedient, and not cowardly ; and, getting a light and a stick, he went to the mysterious room, closely followed by the two boys.

At the exact moment when they were entering the nursery, the eldest Mudlark, having made several attempts to get through the house without success, had got the secret panel open for the fourth time. He was about to step into the recess, and through the closed doors into the room, when he heard voices, and saw a light gleaming through the crevice. He had only just time to retire on the secret staircase, and hurriedly close the panel, when James Ross and the two Masters Gudgeons stood before the deceptive wall. If the eldest Mudlark had remained behind the panel, after he had closed it, he might have discovered a thin ray of light thrown across the secret staircase-landing, which would have shown his quick eye that something was wrong. But as he could not put up the iron bar by himself, without a struggle and a noise, and as the smothered cries of the stolen infant (who had been rather restless for the last half-hour) reached his sharp ears up the staircase, he went rapidly down into the vault. The two young Mudlarks had made a fatal mistake in their victualling department ; they had brought bread for the child, and bread and cold potatoes for themselves, but they had entirely omitted the very necessary article of drink. No water was to be got where they were—the eldest Mudlark had searched the nursery above without finding any ; and the child, they felt, must be crying for drink, as they began to be very thirsty themselves.

In closing the panel above thus hurriedly, an old cotton dress, belonging to the suspected Sarah Finch, which was hanging against the wall of the recess, had this time been caught in the secret door, leaving a thin line open all up the wainscoting, through which the ray of light from James Ross's candle was thrown on the landing at the secret side. This unusual crevice very quickly attracted the observation of the searchers, and a slanting push against the wainscoting, with the heavy pressure of the man-servant's strong hand, sent the secret door gliding to the very root of its hiding-place.

The delight of the two Masters Gudgeons at this discovery knew no bounds ; and if they had not been restrained by James Ross's prudence, they would have shouted so as to have alarmed the inmates of the vault, and the whole house besides.

James was not unused to underground work, for before he had entered the service of Mr Gudgeons he had been engaged with the company of which that gentleman was the secretary, and had had a good deal to do with the laying of gas or water pipes. Taking off his boots, and grasping his thick stick in his hands, he left his candle behind him in the recess, in charge of the two Masters Gudgeons, and went silently and stealthily down the winding stairs. A sight met his eye when he got to the bottom which he had little expected. Crouched in a corner of the vault were the two Mudlarks, looking very muddy and ragged, the youngest with his back towards the wall, looking on, while the eldest was nursing the infant, and endeavouring to pacify it, as before, with pieces of chewed pulpy bread. There was a strong light thrown on its face, and on the whole group, by the rays of the bull's-eyed lantern. While James was making this observation, the two Masters Gudgeons above could not restrain their curiosity, and not being very expert or careful in coming steadily down a narrow flight of strange winding stairs in the dark, the foremost—Master Harry—made a slip and fell, rolling upon James in a noisy and most unexpected manner. In an instant the two Mudlarks, with all their animal instincts aroused, were on their legs, and, with the lamp and the child, flying with sure and rapid feet down the passage towards the old sewer. James Ross hastened after them, but with much less speed, perhaps because he was without his boots; and they stood a fair chance of getting off once more with their burden. Their light died away in the distance, and the short jerky cries of the lost baby, who was being excessively shaken in the flight, began to grow fainter and fainter to the pursuer's ears.

The two Masters Gudgeons were left in fear and wonder on the secret stairs; while the two young Mudlarks had got nearly to the bottom of the long incline which led to the vault. Here the eldest Mudlark, who now carried both baby and lantern, came suddenly to a full stop. The reason of this unexpected check was soon made manifest, for throwing the light down, and along the passage in front, they found it one narrow stream of deep black water. The eldest Mudlark had been warned of this flood by first feeling it on his feet, and the distant washing, gurgling sound soon told them the source of this unwelcome stream. The tides must have swollen during the last two days, and the river must have poured up the old main, across the old sewer, under the small hole into the secret passage, down the short incline into the low level, and partly up the long incline towards the vault. This accounted for the unusual wet and mud which they

had found at the mouths of the old and new sewers, leading into the great main. The water, if not gaining on them where they stood, would be hours before it subsided, and the two poor Mudlark outcasts were caught in their own trap. They had no resource but to turn back sulkily, and meet anything that might happen to them: and James Ross, to his astonishment, came suddenly upon the fugitives and made an easy capture.

When they were taken up the secret stairs into the house, they were looked upon as strange beings of another world. The servants gathered round them, and asked questions which they would not answer; and the two Masters Gudgeons were particularly astonished at them, as no creatures of the kind were described in any of the romances. A messenger of joy was at once despatched for Mrs Gudgeons. The child was carefully examined by every one in the house, and especially by Sarah Finch, who very properly came down from her garret, in all the pride of injured innocence. As Bessy Gudgeons, in her strange wanderings, had lost neither fingers, ears, nor toes; as none of her limbs were broken or injured; as she ate a good supper of milk and pounded biscuit, and seemed all the better for it; as she also took kindly to a warm bath and a clean nightgown (for she was in rather a soiled condition), and seemed all the better for them, the household began to look with something very like pity upon the two poor, miserable, doglike Mudlarks, who clung together on the floor in a corner of the nursery, waiting for their doom. Food was given them, which they did not refuse; and generally they were regarded as two highly-curious specimens of the monkey tribe, caught by James Ross, gardener and general man-servant, somewhere in the bowels of the earth.

When Mrs Gudgeons returned, she was delighted to regain her baby; and after she had almost kissed it into a state of scarlet fever, she had some feeling left in her large motherly heart for the poor, wretched children who had stolen it, but who had treated it well while stolen.

When Mr Gudgeons returned from Mr Winks's office, very sulky and tired, about half-past ten o'clock, the scene in the hall was nothing but a domestic riot. Everybody gathered round him, without regard to age or position, and told the story of the baby's recovery, all shouting at once.

Mr Gudgeons was the victim of conflicting emotions. As a father, he was glad that his child had been restored; as a man of acknowledged business ability, he was annoyed that he had not earned the

credit of its recovery; as a respectable member of society, he felt that he ought to give the two young Mudlarks into custody; as a man, he had some pity for their wild and forlorn condition; and as a person with fixed opinions and a system of education, he was extremely disgusted to hear that such a book had been brought into his house as the 'Bleeding Baron of Barnet,' and read with such evident profit as to lead to the restoration of the lost baby.

Mr Gudgeons, after listening to the story, which he extracted with difficulty from the two Mudlarks, became more calm. He was glad to find a reasonable and natural, if not a common-place, explanation of the seeming mystery; and he was also glad that he had got back his child without acceding to the extravagant demands of the irritating and extortionate Dick Muzzle. Mr Gudgeons delivered a long lecture to the two Mudlarks upon the beauties of cleanliness, sobriety, arithmetic, and the use of the globes; and as they listened very attentively, he was so well satisfied, that in a moment of weakness he allowed them to go. Mrs Gudgeons, in another moment of weakness, sent a servant after them with some money, the instant they had left the house; but they fled like deer, upon getting their liberty, and were never seen by the family again.

After another lecture to his sons and the household, upon the folly of believing in the wonderful and romantic, Mr Gudgeons gave the order to retire to rest.

The next morning, Mr Winks was duly paid for his not very productive services, and Sarah Finch was handsomely rewarded for the contempt of *habeas corpus* which had been shown in the mild detention of her person.

Report said that she married the gardener and general manservant, James Ross, and was very careful with her own babies, having them all tied at night to an alarum-bell, which rang up the little household whenever they moved their arms or legs. Report said that Dick Muzzle became a shining example of a converted thief (perhaps because he was not clever enough for his business), and that his wife and his two sharp boys were much improved by his reformation.

Report did not say—for it was too well known—that in exactly six months from the day of the singular robbery, Mr Gudgeons had removed to a house which he had had built by contract, under his own eye, upon his own ground, far away from Deadman's Fields, every brick, stone, and timber of which was thoroughly and incontestably modern.

MY TWO PARTNERS.

I.



WHY do men become chimney-sweeps, dust-contractors, sausage-makers, meat-salesmen, and soap-manufacturers? Why do men in large orchestras play upon kettle-drums, cymbals, trombones, and serpents, instead of choosing violins, flutes, and clarionets? I cannot make it out.

II.

I awoke one morning, and found myself a man of property. A man of property! There is a bitter mockery concealed in those words. My uncle had died suddenly, without a will, and I was his heir. Heir to what? Three distinct and gigantic nuisances;—a bone-boiling factory, a skin-drying settlement, and a patent manure depôt. Inscrutable fate! My mother on her death-bed had exhorted me to be genteel; she had left me a genteel income; and I had lived a genteel life. It was all over now. At the early age of twenty-five, with the romantic name of Edwin Gazelle, I was sucked into the vortex of trade.—And such a trade!

III.

I went over my new possessions. It was a hard, sad task. I saw in the distance a bleak, bare wharf, which they told me was mine; but I did not venture personally to measure its extent. I saw several rotten-looking barges lying off this wharf, and, in them, several men, who seemed to be dancing and chirruping in the mud. They cheered me vigorously from the depths of their unwholesome craft, and I gave them beer. They were happy;—happier than their new master, who was obliged to conceal his conflicting emotions.

‘Shall I put your name, sir, upon the barge?’ asked my late uncle’s chief clerk, who was now my managing man.

‘Not at present, Steevens,’ I replied with a shudder, ‘not at present. Oh, certainly not at present.’

The next place to inspect was the skin-drying settlement; a Robinson Crusoe-like collection of huts that were built of twigs and branches. Here were hundreds of thin, flat, spectral forms of animals stretched upon the ground, and swinging upon strings over my head. A child’s frock and a few pairs of socks were hung in the centre of

these phantoms; relieving the animal wilderness with a little humanity.

‘What is all this?’ I asked of Steevens.

‘These are your skins,’ returned my managing man.

‘And the clothes?’

‘They belong to the keeper’s children.’

We left the place without examining further, although the patent manure depôt was at the back of these premises. The aspect was not cheering, and the smell was indescribable.

From the skin-yard we proceeded to the bone-boiling factory; the chief of my new possessions. I had come into my property, and I was compelled, in common decency, to go over it; but there are certain things that a man is not equal to, even when interest and curiosity prompt him to undertake the task. The factory was large, busy, and situated near an important main road; and, at the moment I approached it, the least endurable part of its manufacturing process was in full operation.

‘Steevens,’ I said, faintly, ‘where is the chief counting-house?’

‘In the centre of the factory-yard,’ replied my managing man.

‘Then, Steevens,’ I returned, holding my scented handkerchief to my nose, ‘as I have an appointment now, you shall bring the books and papers to my rooms at six o’clock this evening.’

At the time fixed he came, in company with one Mr Nickel, a friend of mine of experienced business habits. We employed ourselves till nearly midnight. The examination, as far as I could make out, went to show that the property, if rather repulsive, was decidedly lucrative. It was agreed that, to advertise it for sale, was worse than useless; and, appointing my friend as general inspector, to look after my interest, I accepted my destiny. From that hour I was a bone-boiler.

IV.

I had command of wealth, but I was not happy. Although I did not alter my style of living, I felt that I was no longer the same individual. I had bartered my soul for worldly goods, and the cold shadow of the eternal factory was always darkening my heart. I still moved in the same circles I had moved in before. I was still the same eligible single man. I was still five feet five inches in height; my appearance still preserved its pleasing, if not commanding, expression; and yet I was not happy. The name of bone-boiler was always hissing in my ears. The horrid effluvium, which had always

prevented me from exploring my own premises, seemed to cling to my clothes, and exude from the roots of my hair.

I was now nervous and diffident; for I was moving in society under false pretences. Carefully as I had maintained the secret of my connection with the repulsive factory, and its very repulsive adjuncts, I could not be certain that others had been equally discreet, and, in every sly glance, every whisper, and every titter, I seemed to read the discovery of my imposition. The blow might fall at any instant, and I lived in dread.

v.

It was near the close of May, when I received my usual invitation for Mrs Buckram's second annual ball. I was supposed to be the same young, idle loungeur with expectations, living in chambers, as I was some months before; and scores of such invitations came to me in the course of the year. I accepted this one gladly, for I knew that SHE would be there: Emma Sandford, Mrs Buckram's niece, and the fairest and sweetest of her sex.

The night of the ball came, and with it all that I had anticipated, even in my fondest dreams. She was fairer and more amiable than ever, and she devoted so much of her time to me in the dance, that most of the visitors thought we were really engaged. When nearly all the dancers were down in the supper-room, we found ourselves upon a balcony, looking into the garden. My lips had long been struggling to disclose my love; and my honour told me that, at the same moment, I ought to state fully and unhesitatingly who I was—what I was. The situation in which we were unexpectedly placed (was it quite unexpectedly?) gave eloquence to my tongue.

'Miss Sandford—Emma—' I said, 'I dare not speak to you upon a subject that is weighing on my heart, until I have made a full and honourable disclosure. I am not—I am not what I seem!'

'Good gracious!' gasped the blushing and trembling Emma.

'Yes,' I continued, 'at the same moment in which I tell you that I love you, I tell you that I am—a bone-boiler!'

She sank upon a rustic seat, but quickly recovered herself.

'A bone-boiler?' she muttered in her sweetest tones, evidently relieved by finding that I was not, as she had seemingly expected, a man of crime—'a bone-boiler, Edwin! and what is that?'

Beautiful simplicity! Troublesome question!

'Well, dearest,' I replied, getting more confident now that I had made the revelation, 'I scarcely know, as I go so seldom to the works; but they boil bones'——

‘Works? bones?’ she interrupted, evidently full of some sudden idea. ‘Speak, Edwin, tell me, where is this establishment—this factory? you know what I mean.’

‘My property, Emma?’

‘Yes.’

‘About three miles out of London, on the Downham Road.’

‘Near the church?’

‘Near the church.’

‘Then we are lost!’

‘Lost?’

‘Yes, Edwin,’ she returned, in sorrowful tones, ‘it is within a stone’s throw of my father’s freehold villa, and it is the one nuisance which embitters his life.’

What reply I might have made to this I can scarcely tell, for, at that moment, Mr Sandford, a stately man of severe aspect, entered the balcony.

‘Emma!’ he said, sternly to her, as he frowned at me, ‘I have been searching for you everywhere; wish your aunt good night.’

Emma gave me one tender, sorrowful glance, and left the place followed by her father.

VI.

The next day was a busy one, at least for me. I wrote to my manager at the works to cease operations for several days, and he replied that this could not be done. He would boil as little as possible, but boil he must. My object was to prevent the nuisance being very obtrusive at the exact moment of my visit to Mr Sandford.

I went to the Downham Road, about mid-day, and I was shown into Mr Sandford’s study. There was one large French window which opened upon an extensive ornamental garden; and, in the distance, just over the glass of a conservatory, I saw the two black, smoking chimneys of my bone-boiling works. Under any circumstances my errand was an excuse for nervousness, and my peculiar adjacent property did not add to my calmness.

In about five minutes, Mr Sandford entered the apartment, very stiff and severe in his manner, as he motioned me to a seat.

‘Sir,’ he said, ‘after the conference between you and my daughter, which I interrupted last night, I am not altogether unaware of the object of your visit. Take a chair.’

This opening was chilling, and calculated to increase my trepidation. I made no reply.

‘Sir,’ he continued, in a severe tone, ‘the first question which a parent very naturally puts to a gentleman in your position is, What are his means for supporting a matrimonial establishment? May I put that question to you, Mr Gaz—, Gaz’——

‘Mr Gazelle,’ I answered.

‘Mr Gazelle?’ he inquired.

I was about to reply to this very troublesome, but fully expected question, when, with fear and horror, I observed a dense volume of smoke issuing from both my factory chimneys, and I was made painfully conscious, at the same moment, of a very disagreeable, not to say sickening, effluvium, which floated towards us over the garden and through the open doors. I coughed and moved uneasily in my chair, while Mr Sandford lit several pastiles on the mantel-shelf, and closed the garden window with a hasty bang.

‘Go on,’ he said, in an excited manner, ‘go on; nothing but a Chancery injunction will stop this. Night or day—it’s always the same. My chrysanthemums withered with smoke; my family poisoned with effluvium’——

‘It’s very annoying,’ I said, ‘but’——

‘It’s more than annoying, sir,’ he interrupted; ‘it’s illegal, sir. They are bound down never to boil bones when the wind is in the south, and I only ask you to look at that weathercock over the conservatory. Look at it carefully, sir; you may be useful as evidence.’

‘That, Mr Sandford,’ I said, with attempted firmness, ‘I am afraid can never be.’

‘Sir?’ he ejaculated, in astonishment.

‘The law of England, sir,’ I remarked, ‘protects a man from incriminating himself.’

‘You?’ said Mr Sandford, converting his brow into a tall note of interrogation.

‘Yes, sir, I am the proprietor of those works,’ I replied, with a nervous gulp, feeling that all was over.

It was now Mr Sandford’s turn to be discomposed; but he soon recovered himself.

‘And you come here, sir,’ he said, red with anger, ‘to ask my consent to my daughter’s union with an illegal and a pestilential nuisance!’

‘Mr Sandford,’ I began to reply, deprecatingly——

‘Go, sir,’ he interrupted with irritating, though pathetic, dignity; ‘go, you have polluted my home. You have made the ark of my

declining years unbearable; but you shall not rob me of my child!

‘You decline my offer?’ I inquired with considerable spirit; for I now felt indignant and aroused.

‘Good morning, sir!’ he said, with a majestic wave of his hand. ‘Good morning!’

In the passage I came full in the arms of my beloved and anxious Emma, who had evidently been listening.

‘Oh, Edwin,’ she exclaimed, ‘is papa indeed inexorable—and are we to part thus?’

I could not trust myself to speak; but fled from the place.

VII.

Scarcely knowing what I did, I rushed to the works. The men were all on duty, with Steevens, the manager, and my friend, the inspector.

‘Boil!’ I shouted, in my excitement. ‘Boil like mad!’

My two managers looked at each other, and then looked at me; but they made no remark.

‘Pile up,’ I continued, ‘mountains high, and let no copper in the place be other than a cauldron of bubbling stench.’

‘You are aware, sir,’ replied Steevens, ‘that we are already threatened by the inhabitants with proceedings for creating a nuisance!’

‘And especially by one Mr Sandford,’ interrupted Mr Nickel.

‘Gentlemen!’ I exclaimed, becoming more excited on hearing the name of that obdurate parent; ‘you are the managers here; but I am the master. Boil, I say, to the utmost verge of your power!’

The order was obeyed without further remonstrance; and in half an hour the neighbourhood must have been sickening under our repulsive activity. What was my design? I hardly knew. Perhaps to storm my enemy into compliance? To reach him I was compelled to annoy the innocent; and, while I gloated in imagination over his sufferings, I was painfully conscious that my own Emma must be affected by the same poisonous vapour.

At this thought a momentary weakness impelled me to stop the busy nuisance; but I checked it at once, when I remembered the contempt I had met with. The smoke rose higher and higher, and rolled in majestic volumes of effluvium over my enemy’s villa. I was amply revenged; and, as the works became unbearable, I began to feel dizzy, and turned my steps in the direction of home.

VIII.

The excitement had preyed upon my health, and I was not able to leave my residence for several days. At the end of this time, I went once more into the world, and wandered by a mysterious impulse towards the Downham Road. I approached Mr Sandford's villa with no definite design. I had not determined to call; but I was curious to see the place. A mild flavour of the works still hung over the neighbourhood; and I judged, from this, that my instructions had not been neglected. When I reached the villa, my heart sunk within me; for I found the shutters of every window closed, except those of the kitchen. A dreadful thought suggested itself. Could I have caused a death in the family?

Regardless of everything, I hastily rang the bell; and it was answered by an old charwoman.

'Is she—is any one dead?' I asked, breathlessly.

'Lauk-a-daisy, sir,' she replied, 'you give me quite a turn!'

'Is any one dead in this house?' I repeated.

'No, sir,' she replied, in a nervous manner.

'Why are the shutters closed then?'

'Well, sir, I don't know who you may be.'

'Why are they closed?'

'Becos the fam'ly couldn't stand them stinkin' works, an' they've gone out o' town.'

'Madman!' I muttered to myself; 'I have driven them into exile.'

I asked the old woman where they had gone; but, of course, she could not tell; for the address, as usual, had been written on a piece of paper which she had lost or mislaid.

'It's some town as begins with a P,' she said.

'There are five hundred such towns!' I replied.

IX.

A day of misery and a night of restlessness were recompensed by an announcement which I read the next morning in the second column of the *Times*:—

'EDWIN G—Z—LE. The Chain Pier every morning at nine. The air on the Downs is bracing, but it has no charms for me. Better the smoke of a hundred b—e b—ng factories if thou wert only near.—EMMA S.'

I read with eager and dazzled eyes, and I could not doubt that this paragraph was meant for me. The pointed mention of the Chain Pier and the Downs, directed me to Brighton; and, rejecting the old

woman's statement, that the town began with a P, I prepared at once to start for that fashionable watering-place. A few minutes before I sent for the cab, a letter without a signature, written in a strange hand, and directed to me, arrived through the post. Its contents were as follows:—

'Beware of Mr Sandford, who is nothing but a respectable adventurer. Far from having any objection to your marriage with his daughter, he is only too anxious to bring about the match; but, in such a way that no questions shall be asked concerning his child's prospects or wedding portion. Pause, and reflect.—Your Well-wisher.'

I treated this base missive with the contempt it deserved. If it had contained any libel upon her whom I was flying to meet, I would have found out the writer at any cost; but, as it merely confined itself to remarks upon her parent, I put it in my pocket, and thought no more about it. In a few hours I was at Brighton, gazing upon the sad sea waves.

X.

The afternoon and evening passed wearily enough; for she was not to be seen. I sought her on the beach, the promenade, the Downs, and in the assembly-rooms, but without success. I felt that I was rash in betraying my arrival in places where I might be discovered by Mr Sandford; but I could not control my impatience until the morning. As dusk approached I gave up the search, and settled down to a late and solitary dinner in the melancholy coffee-room of my hotel. The cutlet was tough; the wine was hot and acid; the waiter painfully obsequious; a clock was ticking with maddening regularity, and a fellow-visitor, who ought to have been sociable, was glaring at me, ever and anon, from an opposite table. At times the thought came across me that I might have been deceived by the advertisement, and my only comfort was to stick it before me against the cruet-stand, and read it all through the meal.

At last the morning came, and, at the appointed time, I hastened to the pier. The direction was right. I was not deceived. She stood before me, more lovely than ever. I asked, after the first salutations were over, at what hotel or lodging they were staying; and was answered, 'At neither.'

'Where then,' I inquired, perceiving some hesitation on the part of the lovely Emma, 'if not at one of these usual places?'

'At an uncle's, Edwin,' she replied in a sorrowful tone; 'would that it had been otherwise.'

‘Tell me more, Emma,’ I replied, ‘for there is something which you are concealing from me.’

‘It is a cousin, Edwin.’

‘A cousin, Emma?’

‘Yes. They call him refined; because he does nothing but smoke, play at billiards, and spend half his time in a yacht; but he is no favourite of mine; and rather than marry him’——

‘Marry him, Emma! Surely your father can have no such design?’

‘It is too true, Edwin; and any day I may be compelled to bid adieu to you for ever.’

‘This shall not be! Fly with me, Emma;—fly from this fashionable and detestable place.’

‘I cannot, Edwin. Where can I go?—unless—’

‘Speak: I will take you anywhere; but fly, and fly at once.’

‘To my aunt Buckram’s, then; she will do anything I ask her.’

In a few hours we had reached the desired haven in London; and the next morning saw us man and wife.

XI.

My honeymoon was not without its troubles, though my wife was not the cause of them. My friend, Mr Nickel (whom I suspected of having written the anonymous letter), departed one morning from his post as my factory-inspector, with a considerable sum of money which he never accounted for.

On the next day to the one on which he left the country, my father-in-law, Mr Sandford, made his appearance, calling upon us suddenly as we were seated at breakfast.

‘I come here,’ he said, ‘in no spirit of enmity. You have acted without my consent; but I freely forgive you. The portion I might have given my daughter, Emma, if the marriage had been conducted in the regular way, will now remain a secret until after my death.’

After we had thanked him for his kindness, and had wished him a life as long as Methuselah’s, he continued:—

‘I am not surprised that your inspector, Mr Nickel, betrayed his trust, and embezzled your property. I knew him some years ago, and I never had a favourable opinion of him.’

‘Is it possible?’ I exclaimed.

‘You are young and inexperienced,’ he continued, ‘and I am a man of the world. Go and enjoy yourselves, while you can, and, re-

pugnant as the bone-boiling establishment is to me, I will look after your interests—as a father.’

‘Mr Sandford,’ I replied, ‘I cannot allow this generous sacrifice. After all that you have said regarding this repulsive business’——

‘I only do my duty,’ he interrupted. ‘One member of my family has already become your partner for life. I propose to join the firm also. From this hour you will consider me your acting partner.’

And he became a partner; I scarcely know how. Sometimes I think of the anonymous letter, and suspect his disinterestedness; but one glance at my gentle and amiable wife reconciles me to all.

THE GIANT BIGBULLY.

A STORY FOR GROWN-UP CHILDREN.

I.



ONCE upon a time, in Everyman's country, a number of very clever men got together and tried to invent something that should astonish the world. They were too clever to invent anything that was simple and useful, because they wanted to be stared at by idle people. Whatever they made they resolved that it should be a wonder, because wonders are the easiest things to make, and those which bring the quickest and greatest reward.

They decided that their wonder should be very large, because anybody can judge of size, while few people can judge of excellence. One man thought that a great tunnel running under some mighty river would be a work worthy of their talent and industry. Another man thought that a huge building would be better if it had two or three domes much larger than the one at Saint Paul's. A third man, more humble than the rest, could think of nothing but a huge cheese, ten times as big as any cheese ever before made; and a fourth man, with very like tastes, was so pleased with this idea, that he could think of nothing else for many weeks, and at last he proposed that a great loaf should be made to keep the cheese company. Another man, not satisfied with these ideas, was for building a big ship, so large that it would only go into four or five harbours in the world, and so unruly that it would never sail quietly without twenty times more passengers in it, to weigh it down, than it was ever likely to get. Another man, of very warlike tastes, was for making a large gun that would frighten

all the soldiers and fighting men in the world, and that would kill any man, woman, or child at a distance of ten miles. The last inventor was not a wild savage, as any one would suppose, but a man who had been to the best schools, and had learnt all the best lessons by heart.

The inventors all quarrelled, at last, as inventors very often do, and each one went his own way. The man who had made up his mind to build a tunnel under water, went and built it, much to his own profit, and to other people's loss. The one who was in favour of the building with the huge domes also set to work, and spent a great deal of money that was given him by his friends. The two men who had thought of making the great cheese and the great loaf, also carried out their plan, and they were the most harmless of all the inventors. The man who had determined to build the big ship, built it even larger than he meant at first, and it was the most unruly, unprofitable vessel ever seen. It refused to be launched for many months, and killed several men who helped to launch it. When it was afloat it seemed to seek for all kinds of strange disasters, and was at last glad to beg for help from a poor little dwarf of a ship, not one-fiftieth part of its size. The man who had made up his mind to make a huge gun was helped in his work by Government, because guns and swords are always wanted by soldiers, and soldiers are always wanted, so it is thought, to guard the country. So the gun-maker was much honoured, and well fed with money and good things, until they found that his gun was not near so terrible as it was warranted to be. Then he was hooted at by his masters, and told that he could not kill more people than any other gun-maker, which was looked upon as a great disgrace.

One of the inventors, more cautious than the rest, had resolved not to make anything, until he had seen how his companions got on with their inventions. When he found that neither the tunnel-maker, the dome-builder, nor the shipwright reaped any honours (he passed by the great cheese and the great loaf-makers, as being too mean and even ridiculous), while the gun-maker, with all his failures, was made a grand gentleman of, he saw that his best course was to invent some destructive machine. He looked about for a long time to see what chance there was of finding anything new in this way, and, at last, he thought he would make a giant burning-glass.

He set to work at once in a house which he had built at the end of his garden, and after he had spent nearly a thousand golden pounds over his task, he produced a burning-glass at least three feet broad,

which would melt iron, steel, flint-stone, and many other hard things. One gentleman brought a diamond of great value to see if the glass would melt that, and in less than half an hour the precious stone had all disappeared in smoke. The gentleman tried to look as if he was delighted with this proof of the glass's power, but any one could see that he fretted after his lost diamond, and thought himself very foolish to trust it in the fire. Many other gentlemen who stood round while the diamond was being melted, said they were very much pleased at what they saw, and perhaps they were, for it was no loss to them.

The clever inventor who had made this large burning-glass, soon found that melting diamonds, iron, and flint-stone was not very profitable work, and not very amusing to visitors when the first novelty had worn off. So he told all his friends that he could not afford to keep this great glass, unless they gave him a large amount of money, and he must sell it to any one who would give the most for it, even if it went out of the country. Some few of his friends, when they heard this, thought it would be a pity if such a great wonder was allowed to leave Everyman's land, and they therefore tried hard to get a number of people to buy it by clubbing together. One man asked what use it was; another said that he hated wonders; another said that he had no money to spare; and another said the Government ought to buy it out of the taxes for the National Museum. Between them all they could not raise one-twentieth part of the sum required to buy the great burning-glass, and as the clever inventor was determined to turn it into money, it went out of the country followed by the tears of a good many people called philosophers. A gentleman bought it who was going to Tealand, and the last they heard of it was that it had been left in the capital of that country amongst persons who knew neither its value nor use.

II.

Now in those days, on the borders of Pigtail, the capital of Tealand, there lived a cruel giant. His name was Bigbully, and he was a tyrant such as we unfortunately often meet with. He was full of what is called Anglo-Saxon energy, because he belonged to the Anglo-Saxon race, and he looked upon nearly all people who were not of his country as ignorant barbarians. He was very fond of meddling in everybody's business in every part of the globe; especially in Asia, Africa, and America. He had taken large pieces of land from all kinds of poor people, and when they complained he had

caused them to be shot down by his many servants, like wild beasts. Few people had the courage to stand up against him, except the Americans, and they succeeded in driving him out.

This cruel giant had run wild over nearly all parts of Indigo, putting the poor natives to all kinds of torment. When they turned round, and tried to kill him, he roared out that they were the most ungrateful creatures he ever met with, and then he put them to fresh torment. He borrowed all the money he could get from his own countrymen, besides what he squeezed out of the natives, and spent it in feasting and luxury. When his funds were gone, and he found a difficulty in getting more, he turned his attention to Tealand, and as Indigo grew a deadly and intoxicating drug, he found a plan to force this drug into Tealand, and to sell it to the unfortunate natives, who were called Turnupshoes.

As these barbarians, as he rudely styled them, had made laws to keep this deadly drug out of their country, Bigbully was compelled to turn smuggler, and one day his drug-boxes were seized and burnt by the Turnupshoes officers. Upon this Bigbully got into a fearful rage, and swore that unless full payment were made to him, and an humble apology offered, he would not rest until he had killed every Turnupshoes, and burnt down every Tealand city. The poor natives were very much frightened at this, but still they kept up their spirits, and refused to do what they felt was wrong. Bigbully was as good as his word, for he began to burn and murder right and left, and there is no saying what crimes he would not have committed, if the poor Turnupshoes had not given in.

After the fight was over, Bigbully pretended to help the Turnupshoes officers to put down the smuggling of opium, but this was only that he might get a firmer footing in the country. He had too much interest in Indigo ever to give up the profit of selling opium for it, and he therefore hit upon a plan of smuggling this drug into Tealand by means of Turnupshoes vessels, manned by Turnupshoes sailors, and licensed to sail under Bigbully's national flag. This cheat was one day discovered, and one of these vessels was fired upon by Turnupshoes officers. About this time, too, Bigbully had felt very much offended because he had not been received, as he thought, with the proper number of flags and trumpets on one of his state visits. These two things coming together, again threw him into a terrible rage, and he battered the city of Khantun almost to pieces. When the poor Turnupshoes again begged his pardon, and tried to calm him with rich presents, he seemed to be satisfied, but was only waiting for

another chance of pressing forward further into the country. This chance came in the course of a short time, and then Bigbully, aided by a smaller, but equally cruel giant, called Munseer, after burning down one of the king's palaces, and killing many more natives, fixed himself at Pigtail. Here he gave himself all sorts of airs, as if the place had been made for him by the Great Ruler of all, and for no one else; and he never spoke of the natives, except as barbarians, although they were all clever people, who could read and write as well as he could, and were clothed in fine linen, and painted fine pictures, when his ancestors were nothing but rude naked savages.

III.

Bigbully, of course, lived in a fine palace, for which he paid no rent, and grumbled if he was not fed upon luxuries not easily got in that country. He turned up his nose at the food of the common people, because it did not happen to be the half-cooked meat and vegetables which he had always been used to. He was very severe, too, upon the rich people, because they were fond of eating bird-nests; for Bigbully thought he knew better what was good to eat, and how to eat it, than anybody in the world. He also thought he knew better how to dress himself; how to behave himself; how to sing; in fact, how to do everything; and he was too proud and obstinate to be taught anything by anybody.

Bigbully soon began to despise his companion—the smaller giant Munseer—who had helped him to fix himself where he was. They came to words—not for the first time, for they had had one or two fights since they had known each other—and Munseer went home to his family on the other side of the globe.

Bigbully, after this, made himself as comfortable as his quarrelsome temper would allow him, and he had many of the Turnupshoes as servants, whom he treated like slaves. One young man, who was more spirited than the rest, got cross under his treatment, and said to a fellow-servant that he should like to know who Bigbully was, to go on in this way. Bigbully heard this remark, as his ears were very sharp, and he was always listening; for, with all his bluster, he lived in constant fear of the natives whom he treated so badly.

‘You want to know who I am, do you?’ roared Bigbully at the top of his loud, coarse voice, striding amongst the frightened natives.

‘Yes, I do,’ said the young man timidly; ‘I—we—that is, I—want to know who everybody is.’

‘You shall know who I am, very soon,’ said Bigbully, knocking him down with a single blow; ‘I am king of a country on which the sun never sets.’

‘Why don’t you hit one of your own size, then?’ answered the young man, getting up, and rubbing his bruised head.

‘Where’ll you find one of my own size, you impudent rascal?’ roared Bigbully, in a greater rage. ‘Take him up to the top of the black pagoda,’ he added, speaking to the other frightened servants, ‘and there let him be locked in, and fed upon cold tea-leaves for a month.’

Bigbully was obeyed, and the poor young man, whose name was Congou, was locked up in what the giant called the black pagoda, a high dismal building, which overlooked the country for many miles, and which was full of lumber, dirt, and insects.

IV.

Now it so happened that amongst the rubbish heaped together in the building in which Congou was locked up was the great burning-glass which had been left in Tealand by the gentleman who bought it from its maker. No one knew the use or value of it, as I have before said, and no one could tell how it got into Bigbully’s black pagoda. Congou found it amongst a pile of old tea-chests and other things in a corner of his room, and although it was very dusty, he pulled it out, because he thought it was a looking-glass, and he wished to see how thin his face grew as he fed upon cold tea-leaves, day after day. He soon saw that it was not a looking-glass, but that it magnified everything to an enormous size; and he tried it out of the window of his high prison, to see if it would draw the distant country any nearer to him, and so amuse him, as he had nothing to do.

Bigbully had boasted that the sun never set on his great kingdom, and whether that was true or not, it certainly shone very fiercely on his garden and grounds, in which he was very fond of spending half his time. It so happened that while he was lying underneath a parasol-shade, in shape like a huge mushroom, Congou was playing with the great burning-glass at the top of the black pagoda, which overlooked these gardens, and as the glass caught the sun, a bright yellow spot was seen to settle on the tip of his red slipper, which was stretched beyond the shade of the parasol. Bigbully leant forward to see what this bright spot was, when it immediately settled on his nose.

'Slave!' he shouted to one of his attendants, as he started back, rubbing his nose, 'why don't you hold the parasol steady?'

'So I do, mighty master,' said the trembling attendant, bowing down to the ground.

'Hold the parasol steady!' again shouted Bigbully, for the attendant, in bowing, had drawn it back, and the bright yellow spot kept moving all over the giant's body, scorching him through his clothes.

'Great king,' said another attendant, dressed very smartly, because he was a lord-in-waiting, 'perhaps your majesty's liver's out of order?'

'What's my liver to you, presumptuous knave?' shouted Bigbully. 'Lock him up for five years in the black pagoda.'

The disgraced lord-in-waiting was hurried away by several attendants after this order; but the bright yellow spot still kept shifting about the giant's body. Bigbully howled with pain, and the attendant who held the parasol moved about to try and catch it, as if it had been a butterfly. At last it settled steadily on the top of the parasol, and in a few seconds that machine was all in flames.

Bigbully leaped up half in fright, half in anger, and knocked the burning parasol from him into the flowers. Then the yellow spot settled on his long flowing beard, singeing it up to the very roots, making him leap with agony. His yells brought all his servants from his palace and stables, and they thought he had been struck by lightning.

'Get me some water, slaves,' he howled, 'get me some water. Who has burnt my beard, I say? Oh, you shall all smart for this.'

The bright yellow spot still hovered about the place where he was standing, until at last it settled on a little bald patch right at the top of his huge head. Then he danced about the garden as if seized with sudden madness, and his servants flew from him in all directions, getting behind trees or walls, and looking at him more with fear than pity.

'Slaves,' he again roared, almost foaming at the mouth, for he was now quite mad with pain. 'Ha, ha; this is my kingdom, every place is my kingdom; the sun never sets on it. You shall all pay for this. I'll squeeze you to death.'

He rushed into his grand palace, which covered many acres of ground, and the bright yellow spot followed him like a star, clinging to his clothes. He disappeared through one of the broad doors, half smothered in flames. The bright yellow spot then settled on the grand building, which every one hated, and which no one tried to

save, and in a few minutes its timbers began to crackle with the heat. In a few hours it was burnt to a heap of black ashes along with the body of the proud tyrant Bigbully.

v.

Poor Congou, locked up as he was in the black pagoda, and playing with an old toy, was the simple cause of Bigbully's overthrow. The great burning-glass—useful at last, though not in a way its inventor ever expected, had caught the rays of that sun which was said never to set upon the giant's ill-gotten kingdom, and Bigbully was destroyed by their fierce heat as they poured through a neglected plaything made by one of his own countrymen. His end caused no good men a tear, but made millions rejoice, while it was a warning to cruelty, avarice, and pride.

AN ORPHAN IN A CHINA-SHOP.



URING the time that I collected the water-rates for the district of Saint Moses and Saint Levy, Upper Chelsea, I became acquainted with an old crockery-merchant, named Joe Hamper. Joe was always ready at any time to detain me an hour to tell me his history; which was mixed up in some way with that of a person who had deeply injured him. By degrees I got at the knowledge that this person was an orphan, and that Joe considered himself called upon at every opportunity to dispel a good-hearted illusion under which the public were supposed to be labouring.

'Horphans, Must'r Water-rate,' he said slowly, in a hoarse voice, always calling me by this title; 'horphans is all werry well in their way, but horphans aint hangels.'

This was his theory; and he thought his experience could prove it.

Joe Hamper was once a street-hawker, going up and down the terraces and round the squares with a very heavy basket of plates and dishes on his arm. What with tramping about all day, and sleeping all night, he never found time to get married; and being of a steady and industrious turn, he was able at last to throw away his basket, and transfer his load to a donkey and cart. After serving him faithfully and profitably for some years, the donkey died; and as Joe had always treated it as a child, and it had always looked upon Joe as

a father, he never bought another, but started at once as a responsible shopkeeper. He took a long shed-like building at the corner of a large street just off the main Chelsea road; and from that hour he was a regular crockery-merchant.

He went to very little expense in his new establishment, for more reasons than one. He found that he and a boy could do all the work at starting; and he therefore engaged nobody but a steady lad, who had been recommended from a glass-shop. Another reason for his economy was a sick sister, who had been left a widow by her husband falling off a scaffolding while at work as a stonemason. She had one child—a boy about nine years of age—and she was sinking rapidly in a consumption. Joe did all he could to make her comfortable; and she wanted for nothing while she lasted.

She did not live at the china-shop, because that was little more than a shed, where Joe and the boy used to cook their meals, and sleep at night; but a clean lodging was taken for her not far off, where Joe could run over sometimes for five minutes, during the least busy parts of the day.

One morning he was sent for before his shutters were down, and he was not surprised to find her dying.

‘Yer see, Must’r Water-rate,’ he said, ‘I’d ’ad a homin all the a’ternoon afore, for a blind at one o’ my side winders kep’ a-comin’ down of its own accord; an’ I ses to the boy, who was a-standin’ amongst the show of crock’ry houtside the door, “It strikes me that blind knows what it’s about better nor we do” I might ’av’ sed more, for I felt I wanted some ’un to talk to, but the boy looked so werry narvous that I sent ’im to take ’ome a wegetable-dish.’

To use Joe’s expression, his poor sister was nothing but ‘a bag o’ bones,’ and she knew that she could not last out the day.

‘Joe,’ she said, very feebly, ‘you’ve been very good to me, an’ I didn’t ought to put upon you any more; but there’s poor Neddy: I don’t like to die an’ leave ’im where he is, because I know he aint happy.’

Neddy was her son; who was occupied in minding the shop, and doing odd jobs, at the Golden Boot, a large shoe-warehouse in the High-street.

‘What’s the matter with the boy, Mary?’ said Joe; ‘aint he well fed?’

‘No, Joe,’ she replied, even more faintly, ‘it aint that; but he’s a-mopin’ away amongst them boots. He never gets out, night or day; an’ there he sits, hour a’ter hour, with nothin’ to look at but

bunches o' boots on the floor, bunches on 'em all along the ceilin', and bunches on 'em agen the wall.'

'Well, Mary,' said Joe, 'that aint werry lively, noways.'

'No, Joe,' she continued, 'especially when he has to sleep among 'em all night. But this aint all. They open the shop on Sundays afore church-time, when he has to be there, an' a'ter this they make 'im sit in a upper room to mind the 'ouse when they go out, lookin' at a great wooden boot as large as a pony, painted all red and yellar, an' nailed agen the wall across the winder.'

'Well,' said Joe, 'that aint werry lively, neither.'

'He's not the same boy,' she went on, still more faintly, 'as he was six months ago, an' sometimes I fancy he's a little wrong in his 'ed.'

She began to cry at this point, as much as her strength would allow her; and this decided Joe's mind about the boy.

'You know, Mary,' he said, 'that I think fr'en's an' relashuns is best apart in bus'ness, an' that's why I never hofferred to bring the lad into my shop. 'Owsomdever, as you seem to take on so much about 'im, an' we aint all ekal to fightin' our way alone in the world, you set your poor mind at rest, for I'll be'ave to 'im as if I'd bin his father.'

'Joe's sister died that afternoon, and he ordered a respectable funeral to be got ready by Sunday. They had one of those hackney-coach-looking vehicles where the coffin is put in the front, and the mourners sit in a small, four-inside compartment behind. It did very well in this case, because there were only Joe and his nephew to follow.

Going to the cemetery, as well as coming home, Joe had a long opportunity of watching the boy, who did not seem to be much afflicted about his mother's death. He was a quiet, heavy, sulky boy, and very clumsy in his movements. His boots were fearfully thick, and he had a way of flinging his legs about, as if they were merely dangling from their sockets.

After the funeral they did not return direct to the shop, as Joe thought that would be rather dull; and he got the coachman to drop them out near the Hammersmith road, where they went into a coffee-shop to get some tea. While Joe was spelling out some murder-trial in an old newspaper, he heard a crash, and, looking up, he found the boy had spilt his cocoa all over the box on which they sat, besides smashing the basin which contained it, and a cheese-plate, and cracking a salt-cellar that stood upon the table.

As he looked very foolish, Joe made no remark to him, but quietly asked the waiter what was to pay.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I suppose we mustn’t lay it on too thick for the breakages—call it three-an’-nine.’

‘Call what three-an’-nine?’ inquired Joe.

‘One corfee, one cocoa, four thick slices, salt-cellar, basin, an’ plate.’

‘No, you don’t,’ said Joe, with some little pride in showing his information. ‘A bob ’ll cover the chaney, as I knows well enough; an’ we’ll settle for the wittles by itself.’

Joe clenched this remark by presenting one of his business cards, and the bill was at last paid with one and sevenpence-halfpenny.

‘Now, young fellar,’ said Joe to the boy, ‘my shop’s full o’ this ’ere crock’ry-ware from one hend to the other; an’ if you aint more careful nor this in futur, you an’ me won’t hit it together no’ows.’

‘Werry well,’ returned the boy; and that is the only remark he made for the next hour or two.

Before they went home for the night, they turned into a chapel near Joe’s shop, where there was a good deal of singing.

The boy was rather fidgetty, which, perhaps, was natural at his age; but Joe, who felt very low-spirited at their day’s work, was cheered by the music and the company, as it was the place where his sister used to go before her death, when she was well enough to walk about.

* * * * *

When Joe awoke on the Monday morning he felt a great weight upon his heart, and it was some time before he exactly understood the cause. It came across him, however, as he saw his nephew, and he recollected what he had undertaken to do.

The first shock he received was a quarrel between the two boys, as they were taking down the shutters; for Joe had not turned off the old boy to make way for the new one.

‘Now, then,’ said Joe, more particularly to his nephew, who seemed to be in the wrong, ‘let us quite understand one another afore we begin. This ’ere aint a boot-shop; an’ chaney aint made o’ le’ther.’

The eldest boy, whose name was Henry, went quietly about his work after this reproof; but Joe’s nephew turned sulky, and trod upon a cheese-plate.

‘You want hexercise,’ said Joe, ‘as far as I can make out. ’Enry ’ll do all the indoor-work, an’ you’ll do all the runnin’ about.’

Joe bore the quarrelling of the two boys very patiently for several days, in the hope of seeing them become more friendly; but as they got worse instead of better, and would not work together in harness at all, he made arrangements with a tradesman in the neighbourhood to take Henry off his hands, and when he opened his shop on the following Monday, he was left with no one but his nephew.

Joe's warehouse was a dense grove of glass and china. There were large bundles of mugs of all sizes hanging all over the place like ropes of onions. There were meat-dishes, vegetable-dishes, plates, and saucers, ranged along shelves, like pictures; and wine-glasses, decanters, and bottles, which were heaped up in the window like grocers' plums. There were jugs dangling from hooks all over the ceiling, like joints of meat in an inn gateway, or grapes in a greenhouse; while more plates, dishes, pans, and tea-cups were spread all over the floor, till you had to walk between them as carefully as if you were in a strawberry-bed. Even up a pair of steps that led to a loft, which was Joe's bed-room, there were more cups, mugs, and jugs, hanging like illuminated lamps at a tea-garden; and under the counter, where the boy slept, there were many more articles, stowed away like cheese.

The first two or three days that Joe and his nephew passed together were not disturbed by any accident more serious than the smashing, by the boy, of a sugar-basin, valued at three-and-sixpence. Joe took very little notice of this mishap, as he considered the boy was learning his trade; but he noticed that his way of walking about the place, and handling the things, was very off-hand and clumsy.

One morning, about the end of the week, the boy was sent up in the loft, for a couple of washing-basins, to show a customer. He went up quickly enough—perhaps too quick; but when he came down again he made his unfortunate uncle's hair stand on end.

'I see 'im a-rollin' down the steps,' said Joe, 'as if they'd bin Greenwich 'ill, sweeping away a lot o' mugs on both sides, like rotten happles, an' pitchin' on the broad of his back in the middle of a dozen gross o' full-sized dinner-plates, as if he'd been a sky-larkin' on a 'ay-stack.'

Joe was not very skilful either in writing or accounts; and when he had spent several hours over his slate, he reckoned the damage, at cost-price, to be two pounds sixteen shillings.

'Well, young fellar,' he said, 'this aint a werry tidy day's work, is it?'

'We never 'ad no steps or lofts at the boot-shop,' returned the boy, sulkily.

'P'raps not,' said Joe, 'but we've got 'em 'ere, an' you must larn to go up an' down 'em without purducing a hearthquake.'

Joe made no further observation after this, but sent the boy with a basket of glass and crockery to a gentleman's in the neighbourhood.

In about two hours he came back, and had hardly got into the place, when a furious old gentleman made his appearance at the door, brandishing a thick stick in his hand.

'This is a nice job with your boy!' shouted the old gentleman, in a tremendous rage.

'Sir,' said Joe, anxiously, 'what is it?'

'What is it?' repeated the old gentleman, getting more and more enraged. 'Why, he's smashed a work of art worth all the rubbishing crockery in your shop!'

Though Joe did not quite comprehend what the old gentleman meant by a 'work of art,' the tone of his voice was sufficient to alarm him, and he called the aggravating boy forward at once.

'I couldn't see no hornaments in the gent's passidge,' said the boy, 'wi' that great basket hon my 'ed, could I?'

'Don't call a bust of Socrates a "hornament," sir,' shouted the old gentleman, getting purple with rage, 'or I'll strike you with this stick, sir; I will, indeed!'

'Sir,' said Joe, more calmly, 'I'm only a 'umble tradesman, but I'll do the thing as is right. That bust shall be paid for, an' anythin' helse.'

'Do the thing as is right!' returned the old gentleman, imitating Joe's voice; 'put that lumpy boy into the House of Correction, then, if you don't want to go to the workhouse!'

When he had delivered this speech, he rushed off, and Joe never saw him or heard of him again, except through his lawyer. The costs and damages for the bust of Socrates amounted to thirty pounds.

'Now, look 'ere,' said Joe to the boy, when the old gentleman had gone, 'this 'ere sort o' thing can't go on for hever. I'm not a-goin' to turn you out o' doors, 'acos I promised yer poor mother on 'er death-bed to be a father to you; but I can't stand these 'ere smashes, time a'ter time; an' I must keep haccout agen you from this day, an' take it out o' yer clothes'-money an' wages.'

'A-coorse,' said the boy, rubbing his eyes with the sleeve of his coat, and crying very loudly, 'you can do as you like with a wretched horphan.'

This ungrateful remark quite staggered Joe, and for some time he was unable to reply.

‘Wretched horphans,’ he said, at last, ‘must mind what they’re habout, the same as other people. As I sed afore, this aint a boot-shop, and chaney aint made o’ le’ther.’

Things went on for some months after this, without any very alarming accident. Breakages there were, of course, nearly every day, for the boy never could understand the nature of china.

Joe left off reproving him, because he found it did no good, and he did not like to hear him calling himself a ‘wretched horphan.’ Joe kept a rude list of all he broke, which got larger and larger, week after week. The boy often looked at this list with a very long face, and sometimes he asked, in the middle of the shop, what it amounted to, as if the idea of its magnitude was weighing on his mind. He had his meals with Joe, so he wanted no food; he slept under the counter, so he wanted no home; and he had got a strong, serviceable suit of clothes on his back. The few shillings that Joe deducted from his wages every week, did not reduce the debt, for there was always much more to be added on than there was to be taken off.

‘Sometimes, Must’r Water-rate,’ said Joe, ‘he put his ‘eavy ‘obnail boots into a soup-dish; sometimes he swep’ a couple o’ cut tumblers hoff the counter, like blue-bottles; an’ sometimes he brought down a whole bunch o’ children’s mugs, like beads, by breaking the string. I tried to take ‘im hout on Sundays, ‘acos I wanted to be soshuble, an’ do my duty by ‘im; but he awlus looked on me as a master, an’ never as a huncle; an’ he didn’t seem ‘appy in my comp’ny.’

This kind of life went on in the china-shop for nearly another half-year; the boy getting more sulky and lumpy every day, as his debt increased; and Joe putting up with many things to keep his promise to the dead mother. Joe had used every means in his power to improve the boy, without success, and now he had given up the task in despair.

‘Talk habout a bull in a chaney-shop, Must’r Water-rate,’ said Joe, ‘he were wus nor fifty bulls, ‘acos he was awlus there. A bull has his gallop hout, an’ there you are; but this preshus horphan was awlus a-peckin’ at ‘em, night an’ day. Settin’ aside the bust of Sokrateas, which was a hextrawdin’ry smash!—sayin’ nothink about hodd tea an’ dinner-sarvices as ‘ad to be made a sakrifise on ‘acos he’d damaged the set;—an’ puttin’ everythin’ into ‘im at cost-price, I made hout at least he howed me twenty-seven pund.’

After making up this account one night, while the boy was asleep, as usual, under the counter, Joe went to bed in his loft in a rather depressed state of mind, to have what he called 'a good think.' He could not see how this sort of thing was to go on, and he could not see in what way to bring it to an end. If he turned the boy over to a new master, he would hardly be keeping his promise to act as a father to him; and the lad might be even worse, he thought, if he was not under his uncle's eye. To raise the boy's wages would be of little use, as that would only be taking money out of one pocket to put it into the other; perhaps with the effect of making him more careless. Looking at it in every way, Joe felt perfectly bewildered; and in this state of mind, like all persons who go to bed to think, he fell fast asleep.

Sometime towards daybreak he was suddenly aroused by a tremendous noise in the warehouse below; and, going to the door of the loft, and looking down, he saw a highly-alarming performance.

'There was that hawful boy,' said Joe, 'dressed hup as if for the day, rushin' back'ards an' for'ards like a ragin' loonatick in his 'eavy boots, crunchin' the plates an' dishes, right an' lef', an' a-layin' in to milk-jugs an' corfee-cups all roun', like Shaw the Live-G'ardsman, with a tidy-size 'ammer as awlus 'ung hunder the counter, nigh his bed.'

Joe slipped on his clothes in an instant, and rushed down the steps, taking his excited nephew up in his arms, and carrying him, kicking violently, through the dense groves of earthenware, to a small, clear space in one corner of the shop, where he deposited him in a large empty basket. The boy was labouring under nightmare.

'What d'ye go to bed in yer boots for?' asked Joe, when his nephew had somewhat recovered.

'Well,' said the boy, boldly, 'you shouldn't gi' me black puddens for dinner as never agrees wi' me; let alone that dead 'orse you awlus says I howe you, which I'm awlus dreamin' habout, like a wretched horphan, as I ham.'

Considering all that Joe thought he had done for the boy, and the melancholy wreck of broken earthenware, the fragments of which were lying about the floor, this speech, to use his own expression, 'reg'larly doubled 'im hup,' and he could not trust himself to say another word. He walked quietly to the door of the shop, and looked into the street to cool himself. After some minutes' reflection, finding that it was broad daylight, he thought the best thing he could do would be to prepare breakfast.

'Ere,' he said to the boy, who had by this time slunk out of the basket, 'take this 'ere broken milk-jug, an' go an' find a milkman.'

The boy put on his cap, and took the jug, which was one he had deprived of both spout and handle, and he went sulkily out of the door and slowly up the street.

He never came back.

Joe waited, hour after hour, for the milk, and day after day for the boy, and he might have waited for twenty years. He forgot all about the destruction of his property, when he found his nephew had really gone away, and he offered a reward of ten pounds to any one who would bring him back. Perhaps Joe's descriptions were not very faithful, nor very clear, for though several boys were brought at different times by several policemen, not one of them proved to be the lost orphan. Joe got his old boy, Henry, back in the shop, and the loss was rather a gain to him during the busy day; but at night, when the shutters were closed and he sat over the small grate smoking his pipe, he could not get the clumsy, ungrateful orphan out of his head, nor the poor dead mother, and the promise he had made.

* * * * *

Nearly three years passed after this, and Joe was bought out of his shed-like warehouse for a very good sum, to make way for local improvements. He removed at once to the main thoroughfare, where he took a large shop, and stocked it in a proper style for a thriving tradesman. He had not long got into good working order, when one morning a very stately lady walked in, and asked to look at some wine-glasses and decanters. She was followed by a servant in livery—a tall youth, who held his head very low, and wore a very high shirt-collar. It is possible that Joe might not have noticed this youth, if it had not been for this prominent collar; but looking through the two peaks of it, full in the boy's face, he saw it was his runaway nephew standing before him. Joe preserved his composure by a great effort, and pretended not to be aware of the discovery he had made; but the boy recognized his uncle in an instant, and he seemed inclined to tumble in his old style amongst the crockery.

'Your young man, mum, don't happeer to be well,' said Joe, hastily; 'p'raps he'd better stan' outside?'

This advice was immediately acted upon by the boy, and the lady soon selected her purchases, which she wished her servant to take home for her.

'No, mum,' said Joe. 'You'll hexcuse me, but we awlus sen' heverythin' 'ome from this hestablishment.'

‘It’s very strange,’ replied the lady, ‘that we cannot have our things when we’ve paid for them! I want them particularly this afternoon.’

‘Mum,’ said Joe, ‘they shall be at your ’ouse afore you are.’

Knowing his nephew’s old weakness for destroying breakable articles, Joe did not like to trust him with three pounds’ worth of cut-glass. If broken, he thought it might be the means of losing the boy what appeared to be a comfortable situation; and he wanted also to know where that situation was. He put on his hat, and started to deliver the articles himself.

Joe found the direction to be a very good family mansion, in a very good family square; and when he had once marked the house, he kept his eye on it for nearly twenty years. He never knew how his runaway nephew had got into such a service; for the boy grew up to be a man, and never came near him all that time. Joe kept his promise to watch over him like a father, by watching over the house. If anything had happened to the lad, and he had been turned away, there was a home always prepared for him by his uncle, though he knew nothing about it.

Joe saw him rise in the same service, from livery-boy to groom, and from groom to coachman; and, to his horror, he saw him drive out, as he supposed for the first time, with a two-horse carriage, containing his mistress and two children. He fully expected to see him smash himself, the vehicle, the horses, and everything that stood in his way; and when the runaway orphan steered clear of every obstacle, as easily as if he had been upon a coach-box all his life, Joe thought there must certainly be some mistake, and that he had been privately watching the wrong individual for a number of years.

The runaway orphan never left that family mansion until he married the upper housemaid, and took a thriving tavern up a mews.

Joe waited some time, thinking that, now his nephew was his own master, he might perhaps call or send round,—but he never did; and one day Joe walked into his bar, and ordered a pint of beer.

‘Well, Neddy,’ said Joe, lifting up his head, when his nephew had placed the drink upon the counter, ‘d’ye ever ’av’ the nightmare now?’

‘Hallo, uncle!’ said the runaway orphan, turning various colours, and giving Joe a great, cold lump of a hand to shake, ‘’ow are you?’

‘Well, Neddy,’ replied Joe, annoyed at this chilling reception, and resolved to tease him a little, ‘I’m rather short o’ money, an’ I’ve called about that old haccount as ’as bin standin’ hover for twenty year.’

‘Ah, uncle!’ he returned, in a sneaking tone, ‘you’re jokin’ habout that, ’cos you know werry well I was a hinfant at that time.’

‘A hinfant?’ asked Joe.

‘Yes!’ he said, ‘a hinfant,—that is, under twenty-one years of age; an’ you can’t purceed agen a hinfant, leastways so my lawyer tells me.’

‘Well,’ said Joe, putting down the money for the beer, and turning his back for good upon the place; ‘of all the hungrateful horphans I hever ’eard tell on, ’ang me if you don’t lick ’em ev’ry one.’

A FEARFULLY PRACTICAL MAN.



E looked a romantic being: his hair was brushed behind his ears, his collar was turned down, his eyes seemed dreamy and abstracted. I met him in the one public room of an old, picturesque inn, which stood on a narrow winding road, between a double range of lofty mountains. Above us were the misty gorges that seemed to reach the gates of heaven; below us—far below us, in the valley—was the foaming mountain torrent; and in front of us were the crumbled ruins of an ancient castle. The stranger was promising; the prospect was sublime. I had already fled from another inn, at another point of the valley, because in front of my window, standing between me and the eternal beauties of Nature, was a wretch—I could call him nothing better—dressed in full evening costume, even to a high cravat, defiling the awful grandeur of the scene by looking at it patronizingly through a gold and ivory opera-glass! I fled before my hands were stained with his blood, and a few hours found me at the other hostelry, in the presence of the mild-eyed romantic-looking stranger. I longed for sympathy, for communication with a mind of congenial tastes. I had been for weeks without a companion; my poetry was getting rusty, my metaphysics wanted air. There was that about the stranger which attracted me, and I approached him with hopefulness.

‘Is it not a scene,’ I asked with enthusiasm, ‘worthy of Salvator Rosa’s pencil?’

‘Worthy,’ returned the stranger, musingly, ‘of something better.’

‘Sir,’ I said, with astonishment, ‘what can be better?’

‘I was thinking,’ he replied, ‘what splendid water-power, in that mountain cataract, is thrown away unproductively.’

‘Water-power!’ I exclaimed; ‘would you defile these awful solitudes with a vulgar mill?’

‘I hate an awful solitude,’ said the stranger, firmly; ‘it is a barren, accursed spot in a world of fruitfulness, fit only for artists to draw and cockney tourists to admire. What man of reflection can look with delight upon that portion of Nature which attracts no capital, because it is capable of yielding no per-centage?’

‘Is it possible,’ I exclaimed, with sorrow, for he was youthful enough to be my son, ‘that one so young, and so intelligent, can be so completely a prey to the doctrines of the utilitarian school?’

‘The world is governed by them,’ he replied; ‘at least that portion of it which is not content to rot upon pauper relief. The very landlord of the roof that covers us has fixed himself here, not that he loves the place, but because it pays him. The mountain, the valley, the cataract, are all considered in his calculations; and though they may not appear as separate items in his bill, they have a considerable influence upon its gross amount. The dweller in yonder gray dwarfed hut upon the hill-side, is another human adjunct of the place. He is the showman of the works of God. He has claimed a property in the wild and the picturesque, and his claim, like the claim of the city crossing-sweeper, is respected by yonder half-starved dwellers in that wretched village on the plain. For a certain number of shillings he will discourse to you upon the beauties of Nature—the natural beauties, bear in mind, of this particular spot, for he has no knowledge, no sympathy, no connection, in fact, as the tradesmen say, with the adjoining establishment, ten miles off, where there are more mountains, more valleys, and more streams. Give him his fee, and you shall hear a long and lying legend of yonder ruined castle; but if your money is not forthcoming, the castle, the legend, Nature, and yourself, may go to perdition for what he cares.’

‘The man may be weak,’ I replied, ‘but the dignity of the historical relic and the interest of its traditions still remain.’

‘I am surprised,’ returned the youthful stranger, becoming more animated, ‘that you, as a man of the world, can say so. The castle has sunk to the level of a booth at a fair. It was bought at an auction by a speculative capitalist, some years back; and the registered charge for admission pays him a very excellent per-centage on his venture.’

‘Don’t use that dreadful term, “per-centage,” in connection with such things,’ I replied, rather annoyed at being found in error upon a matter of fact.

‘And why not,’ asked the young and pertinacious utilitarian, ‘when per-centages govern nearly every relation of life? That winding road, running over the mountains, which you admire so much; and so do I—in pictures; of what use is its undulating beauty, except to increase the cost of provisions fifty per cent. before they reach the inhabitants of that wretched village on the plain?’

‘Why don’t the inhabitants leave the village,’ I asked, in triumph, ‘and live in the distant market-town, where the provisions come from?’

‘There are many reasons against that,’ he replied, not at all disconcerted, ‘the chief one being a difference of two hundred per cent. in the matter of house-rent. The neighbouring market-town (ten miles distant), in addition to being already crowded with population, has the misfortune to be situated near a volcano, and to be subjected to occasional earthquakes. Leaving the earthquakes out of the question, the volcano (of which you are no doubt a distant admirer) has a perceptible influence upon the value of house-property within the range of its eccentric operations. The science of insurance not having yet reached this spot, the convulsions of Nature—that, I believe, is the term—are not discounted beforehand; and the natural consequence is, that the landlord looks for his safety and profit in a high tariff for houses.’

There was nothing I could contradict in this, and I therefore held my peace.

‘I have travelled much,’ continued the unromantic stranger, ‘and I have found the law of per-centages the same in all countries. The brigands of Spain, about whom so much exciting fiction has been spread through the pages of our story-books, lose all their picturesque and adventurous character upon closer acquaintance, and sink to the prosaic level of an English turnpike. Travellers look for them as a matter of course; their sudden appearance from the roadside ambush is mechanically provided for; the regulation bag of money is handed over to them without resistance; the rifled carriage departs in one direction, the gorged banditti in another; and the whole thing ends far more quietly and tamely than the payment of a commuted tithe. Commercial travellers in the wine-trade are now the chief sufferers; and they tell me that the bandits’ tax amounts in English money to about a shilling a mile; or a charge upon their goods of twenty per cent., which the purchaser has, of course, to pay.’

‘Thank Heaven!’ I exclaimed, ‘we have no such absurdities in England.’

‘Hundreds,’ returned the young utilitarian, coolly, ‘if it were worth our while to search for them; even the whole army of Customs’ duties, and their cost of collection. The bandits’ tax is illegal, because it only benefits the individual; the Customs’ tax is legal, because it benefits the State. The distinction is plain; but the difference is not so obvious.’

‘Does everything,’ I inquired, ‘present itself to your peculiarly trained mind in the same form—eternally balanced by what you please to call the law of per-centage?’

‘Everything,’ replied the stranger. ‘The man who is loudest in his complaints of the nuisance of an adjoining den for stewing down old floor-cloth forgets the influence which his obnoxious neighbour has had upon his rent. The smell of a soap-boiling yard is not a pleasant thing, especially at dinner-time; but there is a per-centage of reduction, which, coming from a landlord, would make even that nuisance a tolerated if not an agreeable companion. We may push the investigation further. The accidents that afflict humanity are painful things, but their possible occurrence is calculated beforehand, and raises the rate of wages.’

‘Sir!’ I said, with some little indignation, for I began to be annoyed at the infallible tone of the stranger, ‘you have taken the bloom from the grand and beautiful in Nature; but the human race, in its sorrows and its sufferings, is too sacred a subject to be dealt with lightly.’

‘I deal with nothing lightly,’ returned the stranger; ‘I merely observe and record the things that are. There is hardly anything granted to humanity which humanity is not willing to sell. Health, freedom, even life itself, go for little in the scale against the all-powerful law of per-centages. I may sink two shafts upon this very spot—and, by the way, there are abundant indications of coal and iron’—(I shuddered at the thought), ‘and one mine shall be a perfect subterranean paradise, the other a constant prey to fire and choke-damp. Will the first be crowded with miners and the second deserted? Certainly not. The wages of the last will be advanced a hundred per cent. upon the first, and the balance of labour in both mines will be perfect.’

‘Horrible doctrine!’ I murmured.

‘But true,’ responded the stranger. ‘If I improve the ventilation in the dangerous mine—more it may be for the economy of working than the love of my fellow-creatures—in proportion as I succeed so does the per-centage of my profits rise and the per-centage of my miners’ wages fall.’

‘Have you any heart or sympathy,’ I inquired; ‘or are you merely a splendid automaton capable of speech?’

‘I have both heart and sympathy,’ replied the stranger, ‘but I do not throw them away. The gambler stakes his fortune on the game, and claims no pity when he loses. He is logical and self-reliant. The workman, moved by the high per-centage of wages, goes with open eyes into a noxious lead-mill, and takes the consequences. When, in the common course of things, his face becomes puffed and bloated as an apple-pudding, and his toes sometimes come off with his boots, he has no right to look at me with a rueful countenance—he has played, and he has lost——’

At this moment the gentleman in full evening costume, whom I fled from in disgust at another part of the valley, came suddenly into the room.

‘Young man, young man! said the old beau, looking through an eye-glass, and at once addressing the unromantic stranger in a tone of dignified severity, ‘do we meet again, and do I still find you preaching your dangerous and pernicious doctrines to any one who will listen to them?’

‘I sought no audience,’ said the stranger, good-humouredly, ‘and I seek no converts. You are old and poetical; I am young and practical. I may be mistaken, but I think the world is at present with me. Good day.’

‘Eccentric but highly-gifted being,’ I said, ‘before you go, tell me how it is you wear the outer garb of poesy, without the inner heart?’

‘Because,’ returned the unromantic stranger, with a glance of meaning at the old beau’s stiff and lofty cravat, ‘it increases my comfort two hundred per cent., and saves me another two hundred per cent. in washing.’

He turned to leave the room, but before he went he lingered at the door for a parting word, and said, addressing me with a mysterious emphasis—

‘Give me another ten years before you return to this place; even to the hour, and to the day.’

There was a hidden meaning—even a threat in this remark, and it dwelt in my ear. The gentleman in the full evening costume denounced the departed stranger as a serious young coxcomb, and although I assented outwardly, I had my doubts. The gentleman in the full evening costume discoursed upon ‘metaphysics—even to the dizzy heights of Kant and Hegel—and I was surprised that external appearances led me into flying hastily from such an agreeable com-

panion. The gentleman in the full evening costume dwelt upon poetry, and I was content to listen for hours, for he had touched a sympathetic chord.

‘I cannot account,’ he said, ‘for the effect which Moore’s writings had upon my mind, for I was not a young man at the time.’

From that moment our friendly intercourse was complete.

Years rolled on, and I had not forgotten the mysterious words of the young and unromantic stranger. The time came round, and I could not resist the impulse to return once more to the mountain valley. I had travelled, in the interval, almost incessantly; living with many strange people who spoke in many strange tongues. I had met the gentleman in the full evening costume in many noted cities; and at last I had seen him die with propriety, and buried in a cemetery far from his native land. His hotel-bills were always paid; and he was followed with regret.

It was the very day of the year—almost the very hour—when I arrived at the entrance of the mountain-pass. The solitude seemed unaccountably destroyed; the roads were level and more direct; the embankments were well-formed and carefully kept; there was a novel hum of life, and many people and loaded waggons passed me to and fro. I pursued my way, doubting and bewildered, until I came to the spot where once stood the old roadside inn. Its place knew it no more, and a row of cottages, neat and new, occupied its position, overlooking the valley below.

A young man was standing in the front of this small and elevated settlement, evidently waiting for me, though not looking as if he expected my approach. It was the unromantic stranger.

‘Is it possible,’ he said, ‘that one so dreamy, and so imaginative, can punctually keep an appointment of ten years’ standing?’

‘I am here,’ I replied, ‘impelled by a mysterious curiosity; and I see at a glance what it is you have to show me.’

I looked down into the valley. The mountain stream was bridged over in several places, and studded with many mills in full activity; some with large turning wheels; some with lofty chimneys which gave forth volumes of black smoke. Many people were hurrying along the roads of the plain, which now led to a large and busy town, instead of the wretched collection of huts that was once the village. In the distance was the mouth of a large tunnel, which denoted a new road through the mountains, and many shafts of mines and iron-works dotted the hill-sides in all directions.

‘And you have been the author of all this?’ I said, turning to my companion.

‘No,’ he said, laughing; ‘it is still the eternal per-centages. I have been the originator, but the mineral productiveness of the mountain, the water-power of the stream, have caused this change from death to life.’

‘The poetry is gone,’ I replied; ‘the hard reality remains.’

‘Not so,’ he returned; ‘for there is a poetry of labour and success, as well as of idleness and decay. The ground beneath our feet is now a hollow hive of industry, shaming the silent grotto of Antiparos in beauty, grandeur, and extent. The caverns in the mountain side—no longer the home of wolves and bears—are filled with the ring of hammers held by stout-armed men, who work by fires till they glow as in the sunset. The lofty chimney, which rises on yonder hill, is a monument worth all the columns raised to heroic fools; and at night it stands out sharply against the clear, blue sky, while the golden stars and planets cluster round its summit, crowding to peep down into the fierce white furnace below.’

The pleading, able as it was, did not prevail, and I still retained the convictions of a life. I turned my back for ever upon the place, and at the same moment that I blotted out the valley from my ancient tourist’s guide, another pen was busy in recording its claims as one of the greatest industrial wonders of the age.

BRISTLES AND FLINT.



WHEN the Direct Burygold Railway was opened, nothing met the eye but clean, new masses of brickwork; gravelled roads, bright rails, iron girders, lines of brilliant carriages, vast stations, solid bridges, armies of porters, luxurious waiting-rooms, palatial entrance-halls, endless corridors, encaustic pavements, and Grecian porticos. What could be grander? What could be more imposing? Every director of the Burygold Railway was a monarch, and the chairman was the monarch of them all. No troublesome accounts and balance-sheets were there to damp the joy of a splendid inauguration. Contractors had not sent in their supplementary charges; lawyers’ bills for parliamentary conflicts and the purchase of land were not even copied out, much less delivered. Great George Street was waiting to gather strength for a more effective spring; and Park Street, for the present, was perfectly tranquil.

Burygold was one of the most important manufacturing towns in the country. Its increase of population, and industrial development, during the last ten years, had astonished even its most sanguine inhabitants. Old statisticians stared, and could scarcely believe their eyes when they saw the report of the last census. No equal example of rapid growth and apparent prosperity was recorded in the national annals. Its consumption of raw material was something fabulous; and its productions were known and appreciated in every corner of the globe. No one could see it—or rather visit it, and try to see it—without being at once impressed with an overwhelming sense of its importance. People upon provincial and metropolitan platforms got up and descanted loudly upon its ‘mission,’ and were received with the respect due to inspired unveilers of the future. No town could number so many factory chimneys; no factory chimneys were so lofty; no chimneys sent forth such volumes of smoke. You might pass near to it on a sunny day, and, great as it was, be unaware of its existence, because of the self-created cloud that enveloped it. From a quiet country road, a few miles distant, you might observe a black dense mass of vapour in the air above the trees, which any one would tell you was Burygold. Walking through its streets you would be struck with the hard, dry, anxious expression of the men, the absence of women, and the want of everything that betokened amusement and recreation. It was work; nothing but work—one ceaseless round of ever-beginning, never-ending work. Masters and men shared the same lot together. Men had homes; but they were never in them, except for dull, weary, heavy sleep: masters had carriages and mansions, but they only used the first to save the precious minutes, and they were never at ease or happy at home. What was all this unceasing labour for?

No one could see any solid product springing from this world of labour. Capital was absorbed, and the cry was still for more. More capital not being forthcoming the moment the cry was uttered, the Burygold financiers found fault with the currency system. The whole thing was out of order. The bank charter was a worn-out measure, useful in its time, but not adapted to the wants of a more enterprising age; it was time to create a new coinage, with paper and a few strokes of the pen. Some individuals looked calmly on at Burygold during her struggle; watched her galvanic industry; accused her, in company with every town of her kind in the kingdom, of preferring extension to soundness of operations, and were stigmatized as croakers, and men of the past generation. Her manufacturers strove

against each other individually for quantity without regard to quality of business; and collectively they strove against every rival town of a similar kind.

Many people wondered there had never been a railroad to Burygold before, and they were not at all surprised when, in a few years, the opening of a second line was announced—the Great Deadlock Railway. The estimates upon which this new line was based were very favourable: perhaps, a trifle more favourable than those which had triumphantly placed the Direct Burygold Railway at the head of its fellow-undertakings in the stock-markets of this country.

The directors of both companies—the Direct Burygold and the Great Deadlock—were sound, experienced men, with no nonsense or imagination about them. They were practical men: men who had never had a single dream in their lives: men who made their mark in actions; not in words: men fully up to the level of their time, if not a little in advance of it: men whose names were a guarantee for the plain, common-sense character of what they did: kindred men to those who had promoted Thames Tunnels, Waterloo Bridges, and structures that had created in the country a disappointed and disaffected band of dividendless shareholders, but had increased the number of the recognized wonders of the world.

Such were the men into whose experienced hands the Great Deadlock and Burygold Railway enterprises had fallen; and it cannot be wondered at, that capital flowed in streams of abundance at their feet. Shareholders who were happy in their unbounded faith in names, and their belief in exceptional profits, offered their support even before it was asked.

Two of the greatest men at their respective boards; in fact, we may go further, and say two of the greatest men in the whole trading country, were Mr Jupiter Bristles and Mr Mercator Flint. Mr Bristles was the chairman of the Direct London and Burygold Railway, and Mr Flint was the chairman of the Great Deadlock Railway. They were, undoubtedly, the right men in the right places.

Mr Jupiter Bristles was a man who was fully impressed with the importance of his position. He was always at his post; in fact, as Mrs Bristles observed, in her lonely mansion in one of the squares, 'he seemed to live at the railway.' He was never so happy as when he was in the board-room, or puffing along the platform of the London terminus, with guards and porters touching their caps to him on every side. He was always upon the spot to be consulted on any emergency, and was never so indignant as when no emergency arose for him to be

consulted upon. Traffic-managers and secretaries were all very well—clever, able, and attentive men; but they fully understood that not even the most trifling step was to be taken without the sanction of Mr Bristles. Far from being annoyed when summoned at what many men would consider untimely seasons, it was his pride that he knew of no such seasons; and his particular instructions were that, at any time; at any hour of the day or night; on any day in the week; in the midst of a dinner-party; on Sunday, and even in church, if wanted, he was, without a moment's hesitation, to be called.

Mr Bristles's reward for all this activity, and attention to the interests of the shareholders, was the gratification of his sense of self-importance. He had influence; he had authority; and, without these things, he would have withered away. He was a stout man; fifty; and dressed scrupulously after the fashion of the late Sir Robert Peel. In his own dining-room he was represented in oil at full length, with a board-room background; holding a roll of paper in one hand, and with the fore-finger of his other hand pointing to a spot upon a map lying on the table. In his drawing-room he was again represented in oil, at full length, with a background of engines, bales of merchandise, a bridge, and a tunnel; while by his side was a large globe, on which his fore-finger was pointing in much the same manner as it did on the map. The day, he hoped, was not far distant when he should see his statue standing in the great hall of the railway. When he took a party of friends along the line—a right or privilege of which he was very fond of availing himself—he considered Watt a great man, and Stephenson not to be despised; but he knew of a greater than either of these two—Mr Jupiter Bristles.

Such attention at all hours, and all seasons, 'such a mastery of details, and such power of rapid generalization,' as his particular disciple and supporter at the board delighted to say of him, were not without their effect upon his brother directors. With the exception of the preponderating influence of the great contractors, Messrs Brimstone, Treacle, and Company, over the affairs of the Direct London and Burygold Railway, Mr Jupiter Bristles reigned supreme, and there was every chance of his statue being voted by the board.

Mr Mercator Flint, the chairman of the Great Deadlock Railway, was a thin, severe man, with a crane-like neck, always enveloped, night and day, in a stiff Brummel tie. He had his weaknesses (he wanted to get into Parliament), but he was careful enough never to show them; and, without any commanding power of intellect, he impressed people with a notion of inexhaustible ability, because of his

extreme caution and reservation. He had the masterly talent of silence.

Being connected with the Stock Exchange, he passed much of his time at the London terminus; but he was far above any vulgar gratification arising from the servility of the servants of the company. They touched their caps to him, or bowed, as the case might be; but he took no notice of such useless marks of respect, and passed on. His undoubted application and his presumed abilities gave him a large degree of influence over his brother directors; and, with the exception of that retained by the great contractors, Messrs Fiery, Furness, and Company, Mr Mercator Flint's power was absolute.

The Direct Burygold and the Great Deadlock railways could not exist together, running to the same highly important town, without active rivalry. Indeed a silent encounter had been going on for some time, the knowledge of which had not yet reached the general public, for its injurious results had not appeared in the annual accounts. This encounter took the form of what may be termed the absorption of villages.

On each side of any main line of railway, will be found a number of small places boasting a church, a single street, a post-office, and a population of about two hundred feeble villagers. These villages may be five miles, or ten miles, distant from the line the railway may take; but there they will be, as sure as rivers or Roman roads. Now, the Direct Burygold and the Great Deadlock lines, both going to Burygold, ran nearly parallel, at about twenty miles' distance from each other all the way; the villages lying between them. Who made the first step towards absorbing a village—whether Mr Jupiter Bristles, aided by Messrs Brimstone, Treacle, and Company, or Mr Mercator Flint, assisted by Messrs Fiery, Furness, and Company—it is impossible to say; but there was the fact, that both lines always reached one of these favoured outlying spots about the same time. The effect of so much costly branch communication was to impoverish the main lines, without developing the small resources of the hopelessly stagnant places.

When a village was annexed, the three inhabitants who went once a-week to London, were much obliged to the two eminent chairmen for their kind attention and annexation. Sometimes a single passenger of not very powerful intellect, was rendered so undecided by the equal advantages of the time-tables and fares of the two rival railroads, that he sank down in a helpless condition, unable to choose either.

Not content with the almost simultaneous absorption of humble

villages, the antagonistic feeling of the two great railway chairmen showed itself in no less a struggle than a fight for the sole traffic to and from Burygold. Fares were gradually reduced, day after day, and manifestos covered the walls of their respective railways, signed Jupiter Bristles, and Mercator Flint. The public looked on with wonder and delight at so much directorial spirit; and the time came when the two hundred miles to Burygold and back could be travelled over for the absurd price of eighteen-pence. Strange people came out of metropolitan hiding-places—people who had never heard of Burygold before—treating themselves, first to eighteenpennyworth of the Jupiter Bristles' novelty and instruction, and then to eighteenpennyworth from Mr Mercator Flint. In return, uncouth strangers from Burygold wandered about the fashionable streets of the metropolis, dressed in an unknown garb, and speaking an unknown tongue. Engine-drivers and guards of the eighteenpenny trains were nothing more than men, and conducted their charges with a trifle less caution than usual, when they thought of the absurdity of such minimized fares. The result was that, once or twice, they ran off the line, or into coal-trucks, and both Mr Jupiter Bristles and Mr Mercator Flint discovered, to the cost of their respective companies, that eighteenpenny passengers knew more about Lord Campbell's Compensation Act, and the value of a bruised head, or a broken limb, than aristocratic and regular travellers.

How long this gigantic struggle, as Mr Bristles loved to term it, would have lasted, it is impossible to say, if it had not been abruptly brought to a close by the commercial collapse of the important town of Burygold. This produced something like a truce between the two great chairmen; a reasonable tariff of fares was again resorted to; and the warriors rested, for the present, upon their laurels and their losses.

Burygold had over-traded itself. It had been a Burygold boast that a retail trader could not be found within its precincts: everybody was so extremely wholesale that every form of currency was too restricted for Burygold's vast operations. Capital could not be made fast enough. It was time for Burygold to put her shoulder to the wheel, and remodel the whole financial system of the country; for, its productions had been shipped to every part of the globe, but it had not been paid for them.

It was a sad thing to see so much energy, so much smoke, so many factory chimneys utterly thrown away. The town looked highly practical. In fact, what was it, if it was not practical? It had no

beauty to recommend it; it did not look like a land of dreams. Mention Bagdad or Constantinople at Burygold, and everybody laughed. They knew exactly what those places meant;—oriental indolence, oriental superstition, oriental weakness of mind and body, oriental indifference to gas, main-sewers, water-companies, and railroads. But Burygold was the type of Anglo-Saxon energy; and its mission was to build iron bridges for insolvent States; to construct docks for companies that could not pay for them; to supply foreign armies with swords and fire-arms in exchange for drafts upon tottering treasuries; to tunnel foreign mountains, and to drain foreign bogs, with a very misty prospect of remuneration; and even to take its share in the cost and anxiety of conducting a gigantic war for those oriental dreamers, who were too indolent and incapable to conduct it themselves. This was the practical mission which Burygold had claimed for itself; and, while straining undoubted powers to fulfil it to the utmost, it was in danger of perishing almost hopelessly in the attempt. Its chimneys towered upward as they did before, but with no crown of smoky glory round their lofty heads. Its broken-down contractors wandered listlessly through the mazes of their silent and motionless machinery, cursing the stillness produced by an arbitrary law that limited the issue of paper-money, by fixing the convertibility of the bank-note. A little more time, and a few more banking facilities, and Burygold would have been as active as ever. Now, her barges were lying still and empty upon her inky canals; her waggons were reposing quietly in her stables; her workmen were standing in idle whispering groups at the corners of her black and smoky streets, and in growling mobs opposite to her work-house. Her capitalists were biting their nails over melancholy balance-sheets in her dingy counting-houses. They had been practical men;—men who had not dreamed dreams, but men who had acted them. It was a pity they had failed: but their principle—extension rather than soundness—led to ruin; and their time had come.

Six months—twelve months—passed, and Burygold, instead of ‘righting herself,’ as Mr Bristles, and also Mr Flint, had confidently predicted it would, only seemed to sink more helplessly and irredeemably into the mire. It became evident that something New must be struck out, to give the Great Deadlock and the Direct Burygold enterprises a lift in the market;—to preserve the chance of Mr Bristles’ statue being voted, and the prospect of the parliamentary membership of Mr Flint. This something new, after much deliberation, turned out to be nothing more than a plan very familiar to both Messrs

Brimstone and Treacle, and Messrs Fiery, Furness, and Company, the eminent contractors. It was spontaneously discovered, one morning, by Mr Bristles and Mr Flint, that of whatever peculiar advantages their respective railways could boast (and it was not necessary—to quote a parenthesis from the new prospectus—to enlarge upon what must be self-evident to the meanest capacity), they both languished for want of marine attractions. They went through an agricultural country, a grazing country, an historical country, a coal country, and a manufacturing country; but they commanded no seaport, no coast town, and it was not surprising that their dividends languished. A Direct Burygold and Great Deadlock Branch to the delightful and salubrious coast town of Hookham-in-the-Marsh, was a public and politic demand that was not to be resisted.

Hookham-in-the-Marsh was about fifty miles across the country from Burygold; and, until discovered by the railway surveyors, its sands were almost strangers to the foot-prints of civilized man. A flag-staff, a few huts, two fishing smacks, a boat turned upside down, a wide expanse of mud, sand, stones, and sea-weed, composed Hookham-in-the-Marsh. A little out of the mud and water, about two miles inland, was the parent town; sometimes called Great Hookham; sometimes, from the almost imperceptible slope upward from the coast, called Hookham-on-the-Hill.

Hookham-on-the-Hill had been a village in the time of William the Conqueror, and a village it yet remained in the middle of the nineteenth century. Its few inhabitants were unambitious and easy-going, passing much of their time upon a bridge chewing straw, and dropping stones into a small river that ran down to the sea. Their staple manufacture was a celebrated, but indigestible, cheese, which caused the town to have a faint smell, as if suffering from defective sewerage; and their only pride was in a hard cannon-ball kind of dumpling, which had been made at the principal and only hotel—according to a stringent proviso in the lease—uninterruptedly, every day, for a period of two hundred years. There was also a small ruin in the neighbourhood;—the remains of Saint Nettlerash's Abbey, looking very like a large Gothic dust-bin; and, up a certain stable-yard was a spring, dropping into a stone basin from a rudely carved lion's head in the wall. Whoever tasted the waters of this spring, to the extent of half a pint, was immediately confined to his bed with symptoms of aggravated cholera, and excited unholy hopes in the minds of expectant legatees.

Such were the chief features of Hookham-on-the-Hill; which,

added to the large semicircular coast of mud, stones, sand, and seaweed, that distinguished the port of Hookham-in-the-Marsh, formed, in the opinion of Mr Bristles and Messrs Brimstone, Treacle, and Company, on the one hand, Mr Flint and Messrs Fiery, Furness, and Company, on the other, a more than usually favourable basis for the extension of railway enterprise. A deputation of influential local individuals from Hookham-on-the-Hill, waited privately on Mr Mercator Flint (under the advice of Messrs Fiery, Furness, and Company), and as good as told him that his election for that ancient town might be considered as secured, on the very day that the proposed station was opened in the Great Hookham High Street. Messrs Brimstone, Treacle, and Company went even further in influencing Mr Bristles; for, aided by two faithful disciples of that gentleman, they moved and carried at a full meeting of the Direct Burygold Board: 'That in consideration of Mr Bristles' talent and energy, his undeviating attention to business details, and his praiseworthy devotion to the best interests of the Direct London and Burygold Railway, a sum of one thousand pounds be set aside as a testimonial to be presented to him in the form of a full-length statue in stone, to be erected upon a pedestal in the centre of the great entrance-hall at the London terminus: such stone statue to be executed by the eminent sculptor, Mr Atticus Mallett.'

These movements had the desired effect. The Great Deadlock Company took a long lease of the stable-yard and spring, obtained a highly scientific and incomprehensible medical certificate of the beneficial saline properties of the water, and built a Corinthian pump-room. The Direct Burygold turned its attention to the antiquarian history of Saint Nettlerash's Abbey, and to looking-up several natural advantages in the outskirts of Hookham-on-the-Hill. Both Mr Bristles and Mr Flint, to all outward appearance, sank their individual and official animosities, and worked together for the proper and speedy development of Hookham-in-the-Marsh. Mr Bristles, at every possible opportunity, threw himself into his favourite statuesque attitude, with his finger pointing upon the map, and held forth enthusiastically upon the glowing future of the now obscure fishing-station.

'No one,' he said, 'with any commercial discernment, could look at that vast natural bay—semi-circular, and only open to favourable winds—and hesitate to predict that, when brought by railroad within four hours of the metropolis, its inevitable destiny would be not only to ruin Smackborough, Brigtown, and other watering-places, but to

command at least fifty per cent. of the shipping business of Great Britain.'

Mr Flint, in his own peculiar manner, and in his own proper sphere, worked, like Mr Bristles, for the furtherance of the same object; but notwithstanding the energy and ability of the two great chairmen, they were unable to prevail upon any independent capitalists to build upon the bleak and muddy shore of their hopeful watering-place. In the course of time, a certain number of monotonous white houses, with green-shaded bow-windows, a bath-house, a railed enclosure, and six floating baths, were placed upon the beach of Hookham-in-the-Marsh; but placed with the capital of the two railways. Yet the two extensions were looked upon with a large degree of public interest; and, when news came that the Great Deadlock would require a lofty viaduct, and the Direct Burygold a long tunnel, these things were only regarded as two more great engineering difficulties which nature had raised for Anglo-Saxon energy and capital to overcome. So popular were the Great Hookham viaduct, and the Great Hookham tunnel, that pictures of them were drawn, engraved, and largely purchased by an admiring public. Mr Jupiter Bristles' statue was immediately put in hand, and the parliamentary membership of Mr Mercator Flint began to assume the appearance of an accomplished fact.

Things went on in this way for some months, without any material change. Mr Jupiter Bristles called very often at the studio of Mr Atticus Mallett, to watch the progress of his statue, which seemed to him very slow—a fact that he accounted for from the dreamy character of artists, who were not practical men. Mr Mercator Flint was very busy on the Stock Exchange, and patiently awaited the time when he should be entitled to write M.P. after his name.

Some profound writer has written, 'Alas, for the vanity of human wishes!' One morning intelligence came of the downfall of the Great Hookham Viaduct; and close upon it came a report that the engineer of the tunnel could not, in Burygold fashion, make both ends meet, and that the Great Hookham Tunnel would have to be entirely reconstructed.

There was nothing very remarkable in this: at the worst, the result would only be some months' delay, as the loss would fall upon the contractors, Messrs Fiery, Furness, and Company, and Messrs Brimstone and Treacle. But, at this period, a large and important class of persons—perhaps the most important—whom we have scarcely alluded to, because they always persisted in keeping entirely in the background: the people who found the money for all this Anglo-

Saxon energy on the part of directors; the shareholders—the silent, contented, believing, suffering shareholders—began to stand forward for a personal investigation of the condition of their property; and it was evident that a long-gathering storm was about to break. Great events have received a wonderful stimulus, if not their origin, from very trifling causes. A French revolution was started by a half-crazy woman tattooing a child's drum in the streets of old Paris; and a great railway reform movement originated with the fall of the Hookham Viaduct, and the misdirection of the Hookham Tunnel.

Mr Mercator Flint anticipated the investigation; operated to his own advantage on the Stock Exchange, resigned his chairmanship, and disappeared. Some years afterwards he came forward as one of the most energetic of the railway reformers, and his services were gladly accepted, upon the well-known principle that governs the choice of thief-catchers.

Mr Jupiter Bristles, more confident, or less clear-headed, stood his ground, and was formally expelled from the Board-room throne by a committee of investigation. His statue was ruthlessly and unfeelingly countermanded when more than half-way finished. It was left a mass of ungainly stone, with one blank sightless eye; the whole looking like a gigantic wen.

The two railways were carried sulkily and sullenly through Hookham-on-the-Hill, to Hookham-in-the-Marsh, as there appeared to be nothing better left to do. This watering-place still exists for those who are curious to see it; but it does not thrive. Some people pretend they like its romantic solitude; but their opinion is not to be relied on. It does very well for young married couples who wish to spend an undisturbed honeymoon; but, even for these, it is not altogether cheerful, as a melancholy memory clings to it, beyond the power of the muddy waves to wash away—the memory of one visitor-suicide and two visitor-idiot. As a port, it is still inaccessible to a Dutch lugger.

One investigation followed upon another, and it was found that there were other sores in the body-politic of the Direct Burygold, and the Great Deadlock, besides the Hookham-in-the-Marsh extensions; and that other railways had also sores, and chairmen like the practical Mr Jupiter Bristles and Mr Mercator Flint. The great and blessed legacy left by the Watts and Stephensons of the past had been made the dice-box of sharpers and knaves, and the football of fools and beadles incarnate. Faded widows and helpless orphans came with their withered shares to the gate, and were sent empty away; weeping in the present, desponding for the future.

TOO WEAK FOR THE PLACE.



HE boy was never strong enough for the place. His age must have been about fourteen when he went there. He was inclined to be spiderish about the legs, and his memory was weaker than his body.

His parent (a mother, his father being dead) had asked him several times what he would like to be? She might also have asked him what he would like to do and to suffer? What could he say? They were poor, and he could not be apprenticed to any trade; and yet it was necessary that he should go to work. He made several inquiries about employment, without success, and in an evil moment he saw a bill stuck up in the window of a city tavern, 'A strong, sharp, active lad wanted.' He did not quite come up to the description, but he thought he would try. He was always a willing boy.

They engaged him upon trial at a few shillings a week, much to the delight of himself and his mother.

He began work on a Monday at seven in the morning; his duty being to assist in preparing the kitchen for the business of the day. It was a busy place, that tavern—a rushing, tumbling, bawling, maddening, busy place—between the hours of twelve and four. Every man in the City of London seemed to run in there for luncheon, and to have no time to eat it in. Digestion, and the nourishment of the human body, were seemingly considered to be things of very minor importance by the side of office appointments, transactions, operations, and the saving of a few minutes of time. The marvel is, why they came in at all—why they did not hurry along the streets, cramming pieces of bread into their mouths by the way, and washing them down by drinking from a flask constructed like a pocket-book. But no, they wanted something, and they came into the tavern to get it. When there, their individual tastes were as various as the cut of their coats, or the patterns of their waistcoats. If they had all been content to feed out of a huge bowl, and drink out of a huge mug, the kitchen of the tavern—notwithstanding its large fire in the heat of summer—would have been more like Paradise, instead of its antipodes. But the variety of food and drink which they called for, and which was supplied to them with electric rapidity, was something wonderful; while their combinations of eatables were remarkable for ingenuity and originality.

The boy's employment at this period of the day was to attend to the sliding shelves which descended from the tavern floor to the kitchen, filled with empty plates, and which ascended from the kitchen to the tavern floor re-filled with the various eatables. He had another and a more onerous duty to perform; his ear was made the responsible repository of the crowd of motley orders which raced with fearful rapidity down a speaking tube. There was no time for thought, no time for repose. The powerful lungs of the master of the establishment were incessantly in action, giving out the mandates for endless food in a bullying tone, that he imagined to be absolutely necessary to command attention. He was a bully by nature, this tavern-keeper. Stout, beetle-browed, and perspiring. Paid his way, and did not care for brewer or distiller. Why should he care for cooks, scullions, and stout, active boys?

At twelve o'clock mid-day this stern, well-to-do, determined tradesman took up his position ready for anything. Orders were shouted down the tube to be in readiness. He felt like a general directing an army. At the turn of the hour, the avalanche of hunger came down upon the devoted building. Clerks, merchants, stock-brokers—no matter what their relative stations—small balance at bankers, large balance, or no balance—met in the temple of refreshment as on common ground, for the general craving for nourishment had made equals of them all. It is a warm day, and the occasion of the opening of a new Corn Exchange. Woe upon the luckless boy in the kitchen below. The tempest began with a rump-steak pudding and French beans. Large plate of lamb and new potatoes; small plate and old potatoes; large plate again, and no potatoes—cauliflower instead. Extra beans for the rump-steak pudding. Now, the steam is up, and cooks, scullions, and stout, active boy are in fearful agitation, like the cranks and wheels of a large engine, working to the top of their bent. Stern, perspiring, excited tradesman bawls down the pipe, and demands that his words shall be repeated, to make sure that the order is clearly understood.

‘One sausage!’

A feeble echo of sausage comes from the depths of the kitchen up the tube. Again the boy repeats the word to the man presiding over the gridiron: a glowing, dancing being, who, with a long toasting-fork, keeps pricking, goading, and turning small steaks, lamb-chops, mutton-chops, kidneys, and sausages—about sixty in number, all frizzling together over the same fire. An incessant rumble is caused by the sliding shelves going up and down.

‘Roast veal and ham; gooseberry tart; small plate of cold beef and horseradish; a roast fowl; large plate of boiled mutton, no caper sauce; rhubarb tart; extra cauliflower; large plate of roast beef, well done; small plate of roast mutton, under-done, greens, and new potatoes; small plate of veal, no ham; currant and raspberry tart; two rump-steak puddings; lamb-chop and cauliflower; extra potatoes, new; mutton-chop; large steak and greens; small plate of roast fowl; basin of oxtail; extra greens; two sausages; small plate of boiled mutton and new; kidney; four rhubarb puddings; now then, that roast fowl; small steak instead of oxtail; boiled mutton, lean; extra greens; summer cabbage instead of cauliflower with that lamb-chop.’

One after the other, these orders pour down the pipe, coming up executed in half-dozens on the shelves. Perfect Babel and pantomimic madness below—fully equalled by the Babel and pantomimic madness above. No one would suppose eating capable of developing the latent talent for sleight of hand which seems to exist amongst the frequenters of this temple of refreshment. No one would suppose that much benefit could be derived from a luncheon or dinner taken in a crowd such as assembles at the pit doors of a theatre, when free admission is given by order of Government on a great public holiday. All standing up—reaching over each other’s heads—eating on the corners of counters—tops of casks—balancing plates in one hand, while carving with the other—hustling and jostling—ten times worse than a large rout in a small house in May Fair. Shouting of orders, anxious glances at the clock, goading of excited, perspiring tradesman, who adds fifty per centum to the goading, and shouts it down the pipe. The storm increases; the call for food becomes louder: the varieties are not distinctly marked. Names of meat and vegetables, fish, flesh, and fowl, pastry and salad, are mixed up together in hopeless confusion. The machinery is going wrong. Once the shelves come up with nothing on them, to be hurled down indignantly by stern proprietor. Again they rise to the surface with everything out of order—potatoes standing in the midst of raspberry tart, and gooseberry pudding put in a butter-boat. A barman is ordered to take charge of the position, while the bursting proprietor rushes round to the kitchen to see what is the matter. Once more the shelves go down; once more they come up, containing a scrubbing-brush, and one pickled onion! The storm of indignation from hungry customers is overwhelming. Again the stentorian landlord nearly splits the pipe with reiterated orders, sent down in a whirlwind of rage. A sound of faint, weak, imbecile singing is heard below.

The proprietor goes down. He finds the kitchen a wreck. The dancing maniac at the gridiron has fled with two scullions to enlist in the army.

*'Mon Dieu! the very cook is fast asleep,
And all that bullock's heart is baking still!'*

The artist of the establishment is lying supinely on his back at an open window. The boy—the stout, active lad—has given way under the pressure; his mind is a blank; he sits at his post, but he is an idiot!

City men are eccentric, and very exacting where labour is concerned; but they are kind, humane, and generous, notwithstanding. They felt that they were responsible for this sad state of things underground. A subscription was raised. The boy wanted repose (the cook had already taken it). He was removed to a lonely fisherman's hut on the Essex coast, far from the sound of everything, except the sailor's song upon the river, and the washing of the water in amongst the sedges on the bank. His mind sometimes wanders, and his tongue babbles of strange and unknown dishes; but he is progressing favourably.

A CITY WEED.



WHEN I first became acquainted with poor Tom Craddock he was about twenty-five years of age. His appearance never altered. He must have been the same at fifteen as he was at forty. Imagine a short, shambling figure, with large hands and feet, a huge water-on-the-brain looking head, surmounted by rough, stubbly, red hair; eyes that no mortal ever saw; for, suffering from a painful ophthalmic disease, they were always encased, not so much in spectacles as in a perfect bandage of green glass; dress which, though ill-made and of necessity threadbare, was always clean and respectable. Imagine these things, and you have all that I care to dwell upon of the physical characteristics of poor Tom. He was earning a very scanty pittance as an usher, or, rather, common drudge, at a classical and commercial academy at Hackney, where I was sent as a youth to learn the science of book-keeping by single and double entry, and to post up and arrange numerous imaginary transactions of great intricacy and enormous magnitude in sugar, hides, and tallow. Tom's intellectual acquirements were on a

par with his physical advantages. Being sent out by his parents into the world to shift for himself, as his father had done before him, he had shifted himself into a very ill-paid and monotonous occupation.

Tom's parents were, no doubt, very good people, as the world goes. The father was a quiet plodding man, with no ideas beyond the routine of his office. He had been put into an ordinary government situation in his early youth, and had trudged backward and forward on the same old road for eight and fifty years. The mother was a hard, dry Calvinist, crammed to the throat with doctrine, but with neither head nor heart. Her children—and she had eight—were all the same to her; the girls went out and kept schools, and the boys went into the world to sink or swim, as their father had done before them. They had all been decently clothed and fed up to a certain age—they had all had the same meaningless education—they had all sat under the same minister, and had served as teachers in the same Sunday school. They were all—with the exception of Tom—cold, hard, selfish, and calculating; there was nothing like love amongst them; its place was supplied by a propriety of regard that was regulated by the principle of duty.

Though poor Tom, with his half-blind eyes, and general physical disadvantages, merited a treatment a little removed from the rigid equality which governed his parents in their family organization, he never met with it; he was one of the eight, and he had his eighth of attention—neither more nor less. His mental training was even below the level of his brothers and sisters, because the medical attendance, consequent upon his diseased eyes, took from the fund that was methodically set aside for his education. If, as was the case in the year when he underwent an operation, the surgical expenses swallowed up the educational fund, and something more, his clothes fund was debited with the difference, and he suffered for his bodily failings in a short supply of boots and hats. The father kept a book in which he had opened debtor and creditor accounts with all his children, as if they had been so many mercantile vessels. When Tom arrived at the same age as his brothers had arrived at when they went out before him, he received the same hint that it was time that he sought for a means of obtaining a livelihood; and, feeling his own shortcomings and want of energy, he accepted the offer of a chapel connection, and quietly sank into the position at the school in which I found him.

Poor Tom's personal appearance gave rise to all kinds of heartless jokes, such as only self-willed thoughtless schoolboys make. His

eye-glasses were always a fruitful source of amusement. Many a lad in all the full glow of health, has tried to break those green coverings, to see what kind of eyes were concealed behind them. Tom bore all with wonderful patience and amiability of temper. He had small authority over the boys, for want of force of character, but his uniform kindness did a great deal, and many a little tormentor has shed bitter tears of remorse, when he found the way in which his annoyance was returned. Tom's income was exceedingly small, far under the average of ushers' stipends, but he was very careful and independent with it. Once away from home he sought for no assistance there; and by great economy and self-denial he was always able to indulge in the luxury of buying little presents for his favourites in the school. One day, shortly after the midsummer holidays, Tom appeared in what looked like a new coat, but which, he told me privately, was a very good second-hand one, that he had been some time raising the purchase-money for. It was the day for cleaning and replenishing all the inkstands and lamps in the school, and this was a duty that Tom had to perform. While occupied in his task, his coat was carefully hung up behind a door, though not so carefully but what it caught the eye of a mischievous lad, whose name I forget now, and who, knowing that it was a new garment belonging to Tom, thought it would be capital fun to fill the pockets with oil. When Tom found out the cruel trick that had been played upon him, I observed tears oozing from under his green spectacles, and for the first time since he had been at the school, he made a complaint to the master. The master, a stout, pompous man, replied in these words, 'Mr Craddock, sir; if you had preserved a proper authority over my boys, this event would not have happened. I shall chastise the offender to preserve the discipline of my school; but, at the same time, I do not consider you free from blame.'

The chastisement, to do the master justice, was severe enough, and poor Tom, seeing this, blamed himself very much for having made the complaint, and could not persuade himself that he had not been actuated by a hasty and unchristian spirit of revenge.

Tom repaired the damage done to his garment as well as he could with my aid, and would have walked about in it contented enough; but he had been induced to buy the coat sooner than he would otherwise have done because the master had told him, that 'he wished him to appear a little more gentlemanly for the credit of the school,' and Tom now feared that he should be ordered to purchase another. A favourite relaxation of the tedium of study used to be an excursion of

the whole school to the Temple Mills at Tottenham. An excursion of this kind took place about a week after the above occurrence, and Tom was put quite at his ease when we started without any remark being made upon his greasy costume. It was the last excursion that we had, for at the close of the day a boy got away from the ranks—the boy who had poured the oil over Tom's coat—and was found drowned in the river Lea. Of course, the master—who had done nothing but eat and lounge the whole day—threw all the blame upon Tom, who, poor fellow, was nearly worn to death with his day's work, for in conscientious spirit, that no one might suffer from his bodily defects, he always devoted a double amount of labour to any task that he undertook. He passed a wretched night, grieving for the lost boy, grieving that he had caused him any pain by the punishment that he had procured him a week before, and racking himself with doubts as to whether he might not have prevented the accident by greater care, activity, and thoughtfulness, although I knew that he had borne nearly the whole fatigue of the excursion. As I expected, the master discharged him the next morning, with an impressive censure upon his carelessness, and some cruel remarks upon defects which poor Tom was only too painfully conscious of.

It was some ten years after this, that I got poor Tom a situation as junior clerk, under me, in the counting-house of Biddles and Co.—old Biddles—in the West India trade. Tom's father had died shortly after he had left the school at Hackney, and Tom had come into one of a number of small legacies, which his father had left in equal proportions to all his children. Tom received the amount from his eldest brother, the executor, after a deduction of about one-third, for loans and interest, medical attendance, etc., as per account rendered, from the family ledger before alluded to. Small as the sum was, to a person of Tom's humble ideas and inexpensive tastes, it was a mine of wealth. By great good management he contrived to live upon it for nearly ten years, and it was almost drawing to an end when I seized the opportunity that offered of placing him in our counting-house. Tom had not been idle during these ten years. He had inserted advertisements in the papers, he had canvassed friends, he had walked many times wearily and diffidently into offices and warehouses, he had begged to be employed; but his conscientious fidelity, his industrious zeal, his noble and valuable qualities, were sent away as if they had been the veriest drug in the market, because he could not carry his heart upon his sleeve. And yet no sooner had he left the door, than those who spurned him were loudly asking for that

which had just been offered to them in vain. It is useless to preach about not judging by appearances ; to say that merit will make itself discovered under the most ungainly exterior ; that if the kernel be good it matters little what the shell may be ; I know better ; we all know better. Qualities of the heart, far more valuable than any intellectual gifts, or force of will, embodied in weak and unsightly frames, may hover near us like unseen angels, and be unheeded, trifled with, doubted, and despised. The brazen face and the strong lungs are the practical rulers of the world. During Tom's endeavours to get employment he had lost twenty pounds of his little store by leaving it as a 'cash deposit,' or 'guarantee of fidelity,' with a 'general merchant,' who left him in charge of a very dull, quiet, ill-furnished office, for about ten days, at the end of which time even Tom became aware that he had been swindled out of his money.

I got poor Tom into old Biddles' office in this way. Old B. liked to buy his labour, like everything else, in the cheapest market, and when a new junior clerk was proposed, I introduced Tom to do a man's work at a boy's price, and that way of putting it so excited the cupidity of the old fellow, that I had the satisfaction of carrying my point at once. Small as the salary was, Tom was grateful, and never did servant serve a master with more honesty and scrupulous fidelity than Tom did old Biddles. Punctual to a second in arriving at his desk, steady and industrious in his application to work, religiously exact in his economy of time (which being paid for employing he did not consider his own), considerate and correct in all matters of office expenditure, treating other people's property as tenderly as if it had been his own—a man with few desires, no debts, and with always a little set aside out of his small store for purposes of charity. What did he gain by all these virtues ? Was Tom looked up to with more respect by his fellow-clerks ? I am afraid not. Was he advanced to any position of trust by his employer ? I am sure not. He was treated with even more than the general suspicion that characterized old Biddles' dealings with every one in business—friend or foe, clerk or client. Tom did not command admiration by any showy abilities, and his solid virtues were left to rot in neglect.

Thus poor Tom did his duty nobly, from year to year, without any encouragement, though he needed none ; a poor simple-hearted, honest fellow, he had no idea that he was acting differently from other people. 'You know, Robert,' he used to say to me, 'we are not all gifted with talent ; I feel that I am neither active nor clever, but I do my best, and I hope Mr Biddles is satisfied, though I sometimes fear that he is

not.' This remark was generally made after one of those miserable wet, busy, muddy November days, when Tom was kept running about from nine to six, under a short faded macintosh cape, and when old Biddles was more than usually surly.

We passed in this way something like five years together, until I had a serious attack of illness that kept me away from my office many weeks. Tom, after the labour of the day, seldom missed calling to inquire about me, long as the distance was, and very often brought me little delicacies suited for an invalid. I could not prevent his bringing them, although I felt that their purchase must have pinched him in various ways. The nature of my complaint made it necessary for me to take a holiday of a couple of months; and so great was poor Tom's fear that such a long absence would lead to my dismissal by old Biddles—although even in this anxiety there was not a particle of selfishness—that I was compelled to tell him that my engagement was under articles that could not be broken.

When I returned re-invigorated to my duties, I found, to my surprise, a marked change in Tom. His manner was evidently embarrassed, and in his appearance there was a feeble and clumsy attempt to be buckish. When a man returns to an office after an absence of some months everything seems to him cold and strange; he does not fit into his accustomed corners, his papers look spectral, he hardly knows where to put his coat, and his hat tumbles down from its peg. If the place has been repainted and furnished (as mine had been), this makes matters worse. I did not question Tom the first or second day, as I thought much of his altered appearance might have been a partial delusion of my disordered imagination. On the third day I fancied from his nervous behaviour that he was about to make some explanatory disclosure, and I was not disappointed. After much hesitation and preamble, which he, poor fellow, was little adept in, it came out at last: Tom was in love—deeply, earnestly in love. When he had secured me as his confidant a load seemed to have departed from his mind, and he was happier and gayer than I had ever known him before. As to myself, I was lost in various reflections. I laughed the first and last unkind laugh at Tom's expense, when I thought of him ogling his chosen one through those eternal green glasses. I wondered if the strong olive tint which her face of necessity bore, stood to Tom as the rose upon the damask cheek of beauty seen through the naked eye. Did he kiss those taper-fingers which must have appeared to him as if they were fresh from the dye-tub, or the task of walnut-picking? Did nature, which had appeared to his faint vision,

for so many years, a gloomy picture clad in one solemn tint, brighten up with a more cheerful glow, now that this new light had fallen on his heart? Poor Tom, when I looked at him sitting there before me, his awkward shape and disfigured countenance, I dreaded lest his choice should have fallen upon some thoughtless, selfish girl, and felt a foreboding that his passion would only end in misery and bitter disappointment.

Tom was too happy to notice my abstraction, and his only desire was to consult me about the capabilities of his scanty income to support a wife. Here, with hard figures to deal with, I was obliged to reason severely, but every objection that I started was overruled by Tom's explanation of the personal privations he could undergo for the attainment of domestic happiness. It was needless for him to enter into details with me, who knew his qualities so well, to prove what a considerate, devoted husband he would be. I knew that his income was inadequate, and the tone of my advice was to dissuade him from nourishing an affection that, I felt assured, must be hopeless.

The next morning, poor Tom appeared with a long list of figures, with which he had been working out a problem over-night, and had arrived at the conclusion, that if he could obtain another twenty pounds a-year from old Biddles, he might attempt the step he was anxious to take, with perfect propriety. When he consulted me as to whether I thought he would get the advance, I felt that his mind was made up, and knowing that his long and faithful services merited even a greater reward, I told him to go boldly to old Biddles and ask at once. It was Saturday morning; old Biddles was very late, and when he came, he was very busy; he went out several times, a very unusual thing with him, and when he returned, many people were waiting to see him. All this threw poor Tom into a fever of excitement; he kept running in and out of Biddles' private room in such an uncere- monious manner, and upon such frivolous pretexts, that at last the old fellow asked him if he was ill? This brought Tom to a stand, and he timidly made his proposal. Old Biddles took time to consider. Tom augured favourably from this, and the next day, Sunday, he prevailed upon me to join him in a visit to the family of his intended wife.

She was much younger than Tom, stout, florid, and rather vulgar-looking. I watched her closely, and her treatment of him, though at times flighty and inconsiderate, did not appear unkind. Tom was so absorbed in the contemplation of his happiness, that I was left pretty much to my own resources, and conversation with a sister. When the

visit closed, although I had my doubts, I was unable to form a conclusion whether the affection on the part of the girl was real or simulated. Monday passed over in silence; on Tuesday the blow fell. About ten o'clock a letter was delivered to Tom, which told him that she for whom he was ready to give up all the comforts he so much needed, for whom he was even then planning out some little, thoughtful present, and to whom he had given all the great affection of his kind and noble heart, had encouraged his passion like a cruel, wayward girl, and now threw it aside without pity or remorse.

Close upon this shock followed a formal discharge from old Biddles. He had weighed Tom's proposal. Virtue and fidelity which were endurable at fifty pounds a-year, were not to be tolerated at seventy. The supply was greater than the demand. Biddles was a practical, business man.

Some few years afterwards, when poor Tom's shattered frame and broken heart were lying peaceably in the grave, and his clerkly successor at forty pounds a-year had embezzled money to a considerable extent, old Biddles felt that for once he had made a mistake, and thought of an awkward, green-spectacled clerk who used to sit in his office, and who, if not brilliant, was trustworthy.

'Do you know Craddock's address?' he asked, one morning, as I entered his room.

'He has been dead some time,' I replied.

'Hum! Put an advertisement in the *Times* for somebody like him.'

We did put an advertisement in the *Times* for somebody like him; but old Biddles found he could not get another Tom Craddock merely by drawing a cheque for him.

RAILWAY NIGHTMARES.



SOME men are born to be madmen; some to be idiots; and some to be hanged; but I was born to be a shareholder. Some men spend their money like noblemen and princes; some lose it at the gaming-table; some on the turf; some hide it in gardens, in wells, in brick walls, and die, forgetting to reveal their secret; but my property is securely sunk for the benefit of my country in the Direct Burygold and the Great Deadlock Rail-

ways. While on one hand, I am lowered to the condition of a beggar ; on the other, I am elevated to the rank of a patriot. What I have done would, in the ancient days, have earned me a statue ; but now, under unheroic forms of business, it is silently accepted as a matter of course. If I had sunk my property in endowing a hospital, I might have secured the immortality of a tablet, and the gratitude of a committee ; but my prodigal generosity has only taken the form of an investment. I sign a deed of settlement, pocket my liability, see my name recorded in a ledger of shareholders—and that is all.

Having no faith in reformers, I have joined no Committee of Investigation ; I have subscribed to no society for improving our prospects. I have quietly accepted my position as a melancholy and accomplished fact. I have sold my withered shares for the trifle they would fetch ; and, having no family or kindred depending upon me for support, I have taken to opium-eating.

I am surprised that I never turned my attention to this agreeable investment before. Like my former ventures, it pays me no dividends, except in dreams ; but then those dreams are of the most varied and amusing kind. They come to me without effort ; they cry to me for no food ; they make no calls. When they leave me, I feel no regret ; for I know that a few pence will, at any time, call them back. Beggar as I am, I recline in all the state of kings, with no painful memories of yesterday ; no care for to-day ; no thought for to-morrow. Relieved from the dull checks and surroundings of active life, my fancy runs riot in a shadowy world, where all distinctions are reversed ; and those things that were once my sorrow and my dread, have now become my pleasure and my toys.

The long, silent panorama of the Direct Burygold Railway passes before me : the whole line in Chancery ; choked and stiffened by the icy, relentless hand of legal death. The Burygold station, once so full of life, is now an echoing, deserted cavern ; its crystal roof is an arch of broken glass ; its rails are torn away ; its rooms and offices are empty, or boarded up ; and its walls are defaced with old ghastly time-bills, the mocking records of its former wealth and activity. The long refreshment-corridor is dusty and bare ; its fixtures are rudely torn from the walls, its floor is strewn with remnants of placards and broken china ; and nothing living is now left, except a wild, half-famished cat, ravenously gnawing a bone as smooth as glass.

Passing out of this ruined station to the open line, I find no signs of traffic. Carriages are not to be seen, and the rails in places have been torn up by the roots. Rank grass has spread across the once

busy way, and sheep are calmly browsing, with no fear of coming danger. Breaking through a narrow cutting between two lofty hills, whose passage, once open and bare, is now grown over with underwood and brambles, I emerge into a broad amphitheatre of landscape, saddened with ruins, like the plains of ancient Greece. Standing at the extreme verge, upon the ragged edge of what was once a smooth, lofty, curving viaduct, I gaze down far below into a winding stream, whose course is broken and turned by the fallen arches which once spanned the broad, deep valley. Large iron girders, spreading masses of brickwork, and blocks of heavy masonry, lie helplessly in the clear, glassy stream. In the distance another ragged edge of tall, narrow, broken arches, issues from a cleft in the opposite mountain. The blue, misty hills close in the scene on every side; and the solemn stillness of undisturbed nature reigns over all. Struggling down the steep sides of this chasm, I pick my way, across the ruins, to the divided limb of the railway on the further side. Here I turn for one final look at the silent valley, and then pursue my course.

The first sign of life which I meet on the ruined line is a small side-station, once bright, clean, and new, but now damp and mouldy. Seeing smoke ascend from the short chimney of this hut, I look through the window, and find an old woman in dirty rags crouching over a wood fire, formed of parts of the building, rocking her bent body to and fro, and chanting a low wail. Before I can retire from the window, a dwarfed boy, whose huge head, with a long pale oval face and large watery eyes, forms one half of his withered body, rushes to the door of the hut, and draws the attention of the woman to my presence by uncouth gestures, and a wild, babbling noise. The woman rises quickly, and I see from her eyes and manner, that her mind has sunk under the pressure of some heavy affliction. Something tells me they are mother and son, and sufferers by the ruin which is before us, and behind us, and around us. A vague notion enters their minds that I have either come to molest them, or that I am a member of that class which has been the cause of all their misfortunes. Their actions become gradually more frantic and hostile; and their aspect is at once so melancholy and so hideous, that I fairly turn away, and run along the line. They do not attempt to follow me; but their voices, which at first were raised in triumph at my flight, become by degrees fainter and fainter, until at last they are lost in the distance at which I leave them behind.

Passing along the line, under many broken arches, I come to more life, of a much more agreeable character. Beneath a lofty iron bridge,

which spans the once busy Burygold Railway, I find a group of healthy country children, playing on a swing formed of ropes tied firmly in the open spaces between the girders. Other country children look down from the roadway on the top of the arch, and drop small pebbles upon the heads of the children beneath; aiming especially at the child in the swing, as the motion of the ropes sends him beyond the shelter of the arch. Sometimes those above raise a mocking cry of danger from a coming train, which is received with shouts of merriment below.

I proceed a little further, when I come upon the broken parts of an old rotten locomotive engine, lying half-embedded in a side embankment. The boiler has been half-eaten away. Rats have made it their home. While I am gazing at this picture, an old man in mean clothing, leaning on a crutch, has joined me by climbing up the embankment on the other side.

‘Ah!’ he says, with a deep, heavy sigh, ‘Wenus isn’t what she was when you an’ me was younger, mate.’

‘No, indeed,’ I reply, cautiously, not knowing what he refers to, and judging him to be another maniac victim of the surrounding railway ruin.

‘When I ran away with ’er,’ he continues, ‘acos they wanted to sell ’er in a sale, more than twenty year ago, she was young an’ ’andsome. Look at ’er now!’

‘Exactly,’ I return, thinking he alludes to some romantic elopement.

‘I took ’er hout o’ the station at night,’ he resumes, ‘afore the brokers had put ’er in the hinventory; got up ’er steam, an’ bowled ’er here, when she bust ’er biler, an’ sent me flying into the ditch—a cripple for life.’

Close to this spot is the entrance of a long tunnel, the mouth of which is covered with a dense cobweb, whose threads are thicker than stout twine. In the centre of this cobweb are several huge, overgrown spiders as large as crabs.

‘Is there no passage through this place?’ I asked of the old engine-driver.

‘What, the haunted tunnel?’ he answers, with horror and astonishment. ‘No man’s dared to go through that for twenty year!’

Curiosity prompts me to advance nearer the great cobweb, and look through its open spaces into the dark cavern beyond. Perhaps the words of the old engine-driver have acted upon my excited imagination; but I think I see the outlines of smoke-coloured human monsters, who coil round each other, and seem hungry for prey.

There is nothing fierce and active about their savagery, but it has that dreamy, listless, quiet, bone-crushing appearance of destructive power, so fearful to contemplate in bears, and certain monsters of the deep. Perhaps I am gazing upon the spirits of departed directors.

Declining to go through this passage of horrors, I ascend the sides of the cutting; and leaving the aged engine-driver mourning over the shattered remains of his Venus, I pass along the roads on the top of the haunted tunnel, and descend upon the line once more at the other side.

Here I again come upon life of a more genial kind. Squatters have taken possession of many side-stations. Some stations that I pass are more neatly kept than others, showing the different character of the tenants. Some are quite unoccupied; and one is in the temporary possession of a band of travelling showmen, whose caravans of wild beasts and curiosities are placed across the line. Pursuing the same route for some hours—always with the same prospect on either side—I pass under rotten bridges, under lines of dangling clothes hung out to dry, and through groups of women and children assembled in the centre of the rails, until at last day dwindles into twilight, and twilight gives place to a cold, clear sky, and a large moon. I come, after some time, to a deep cutting through a lofty wooded hill, the sides of which are rendered more gloomy by dark, overhanging fir-trees. Winding along this narrow, artificial valley for a considerable distance, I arrive at a sharp curve round a bend of the hill, and see an exhibition almost as strange as any I have yet met with. In the centre of the valley, between the rails, there is a blazing wood fire, over which is suspended an enormous gipsy-kettle. Numbers of men in strange, stable-looking dresses, are seated on each side of the valley; many of them drinking, and nearly all of them smoking. In the distance, beyond the fire, are several four-horse stage-coaches, fully horsed, harnessed, and appointed; and, round the fire, dancing wildly with joined hands to the rough music of some half-dozen Kent bugles, played by old, half-resuscitated stage-coach guards, are some dozen aged stage-coachmen, dressed in the familiar garb of former days. I see the meaning of this unusual festival at a glance. It is a midnight picnic from some adjacent country town, met to triumph over the fall, and to dance over the ruins, of a paralyzed railway. While I am gazing at the spectacle, a number of fresh roysterers, coming up from behind, sweep me into the middle of the dancing, drinking, shouting group, and I am immediately questioned as to my sudden and uninvited appearance. Almost before I have considered

my reply, the fact of my being a ruined shareholder making the melancholy pilgrimage of my sunken property, seems to strike the whole company as if by inspiration, and I am welcomed with the loudest mocking laughter, and the heaviest slaps on the back that the boisterous villagers are capable of administering. One dozen of men ask me in sarcastic chorus, what has become of my 'foine carriges;' while another dozen ask me, also in chorus, where my 'sixty moile a-hour be now?'

It is the morning of the second day when I reach the grand London terminus: now grand no longer, but showing its decay even more glaringly than the rest of the line. Its interior is vast, naked, and deserted, and its exterior has long been given up to the mercy of the bill-stickers. Its classical portico is a mass of unsightly blistered placards; its court-yard is silent and untrodden, except by the foot-steps of a few old servants of the company, who yet live in the hope of seeing the old busy days revived.

Turning my back upon the sad remains of the Direct Burygold Railway, I proceed at once to the rival Great Deadlock line, which has now been taken under the permanent management of Government. Here at least is life, if not activity; and the great terminus looks very different to what it did when it was simply a public joint-stock undertaking. The familiar policeman and guards are all gone, and, in their places, are many fat porters in leathern chairs, and messengers in rather gaudy liveries. The chief booking office, once all bustle and energy, is now as calm and full of dignity as a rich Clapham conventicle. Its hours are short, and strictly adhered to, especially as regards the closing. While its work is decreased two-thirds, its clerks are increased one-half, and are dressed in a much more elegant and correct manner than they were during the days of its joint-stock existence. Literature is now more generally patronized; and the leading newspapers and periodicals are not only taken in, but diligently read during three-fourths of the short business hours.

The forms of application for tickets are much more elaborate than the old rude method of simply paying your money, obtaining a voucher, stamped instantaneously, and walking away. Every man who wishes to go to Burygold, or any intermediate station, must apply for a printed form; such application to be countersigned by at least one respectable housekeeper. The form has then to be filled up according to certain ample printed directions, which occupy about a folio page and a-half. The man who wishes to go by rail to Burygold, or any intermediate station, must state his age; must say

whether he is a Dissenter or a Church of England man ; must state whether he is a housekeeper or a lodger ; if the first, how long he has been one ; if the second, of what degree ; must state whether he has been vaccinated ; whether he has had the measles ; whether he has any tendency to lunacy, or whether his parents have ever exhibited that tendency ; must say whether he has ever been to Burygold, or to any intermediate station, before, and if so, how many times, and upon what dates, and upon what business ; must state what is his present object in going to Burygold, and how long he is likely to stay ; must state the exact weight of luggage he intends to take, and what the nature and contents of such luggage may be ; must state the number of his family (if any), and the ages of his wife and children respectively ; and must send this return in, accompanied by a letter of application, written upon folio foolscap with a margin, and addressed to the Right Honourable the Duke of Stokers, Governor-General of the Great Royal Deadlock Railway. Having allowed three clear days, for verification and inquiries, the passenger may attend at the chief office of the Great Royal Deadlock Railway, between the hours of one and three, p.m., and receive his ticket upon payment of the fare authorized by Act of Parliament. If there be any informality in his return, he is sent back by the unflinching clerks. He has to go through the same form over again, and to wait another three clear days, before he again applies for a ticket.

With much exertion, the Government managers of the Great Royal Deadlock Railway are enabled to start two trains during their working day, at an annual cost to the country of about eight thousand pounds per mile.

A number of grants and privileges have been made to many members of the governing class, who now hold positions, and reside upon the line. There are the Grand Ranger, the Deputy Grand Ranger, the Secretary to the Deputy Grand Ranger ; the Lord Marshal ; the Under Marshal ; the Lord Steward of the Coke and Coal Department, the Deputy Lord Steward ; the Grease Master, Deputy Grease Master, and the Keeper of the Oil Cans. These officers have the privilege (besides grants of land upon the line) of running special trains for themselves and friends, without any formal notice to his Grace the Governor-General. This privilege has at present been sparingly used, and no particular accident has sprung from it, except the smashing of a ploughman who was crossing the line, and the running, on one occasion, through the end wall of the London terminus, into the middle of the public road.

The Civil Service Staff of the Great Royal Deadlock Railway is the pride and glory of the country. Compare it now, for efficiency and completeness under Government superintendence, with what it was in the days of the late bankrupt Joint-Stock Company. Every man who enters upon even such humble positions as stoker, ticket-taker, or porter must be able to tell the names of the Kings and Queens of England, give a scientific analysis of coal (including the chemistry of coke), and of the theory of combustion, and must show some respectable knowledge of conic sections, trigonometry, and the use of the theodolite. The principal appointments are numerous, varied, and complete. There are fourteen Gentlemen Ushers of the Great Board Room, and one Assistant Usher; eight Grooms of the General Manager's Office, and one Assistant Groom; fourteen Pages of the Locomotive Department, and one Assistant Page; one hundred and fifty Inspectors of Stations, and one Assistant Inspector; one hundred and fifty Examiners of Bridges, and one Assistant Examiner; one hundred and fifty Surveyors of Tunnels, and one Assistant Surveyor; sixty Regulators of Refreshment Rooms, and one Assistant Regulator; ten Hereditary Grand Judges of Iron Girders, and one Assistant Judge; and fifty-six Gentlemen Lamplighters, with one Assistant Gent. The nameless crowd of minor offices are as numerous in proportion, and as carefully filled, as the posts of trust and honour. The system of the Civil Service is carried into the minutest corners of the railway, and wherever there is a department with thirty or forty clerks, there is always to be found one assistant clerk. Every engine is manufactured on the premises, by a body of workmen, overlooked by another body of surveyors. The cost of every locomotive is about double the price usually charged by a regular manufacturing engineer. To avoid even the remotest chance of accident by explosions from over-work, no engine is kept in use more than three months, and some not even that small number of weeks. So careful are the stoker and driver of the passengers' lives, that where there is the slightest chance of an accident from the obstinate refusal of a home-made locomotive engine to move on, rather than irritate it by a dangerous pressure of steam, they desert the unruly machine, and the passengers walk with perfect safety to their destination along the tranquil and beautifully regulated line.

Such are some of the railway nightmares that haunt me, and will not pass away.

A RELIC OF THE MIDDLE AGES.



It came into our possession quite unexpectedly, as a legacy left by an old friend of my husband. It was described in the will as a messuage or tenement, although it was actually the remains of an old Norman castle. Lawyers are precise in their language, but certainly not descriptive; and there was no getting any correct idea of the place without a personal visit. The small woodcut and the two inches of history which we found respecting it in a book upon the Antiquities of Sussex were sufficient to excite our curiosity; but not sufficient to satisfy it. With as little delay as possible, my husband went down, and his letters were enthusiastic, not to say rapturous. He had always a strong passion for the middle ages (which, I must say, I never thoroughly shared), and I was not surprised when he suddenly returned, and gave an order for our immediate removal. It was rather late in a very fine autumn, and although we had only just come back from a lengthened stay at the seaside, we closed our London establishment once more, as my husband was bent upon passing the Christmas at his new property. There was something so novel and exciting in transplanting ourselves direct from a rather dull modern square, with not even a black statue of a statesman to give it an historical flavour, to a veritable castle in one of the oldest counties of England, full of legends and traditions, and venerable with age, that I was rather pleased than otherwise with the prospect of the change.

Our arrival produced no very great excitement in the surrounding neighbourhood, for the position of Rubble castle (that was the title it went by) was somewhat lonely. There were several bleak hills, a scrap of moor-like common, and a bit of ragged forest near the place, and the village was four miles distant. How such a baronial dwelling came into the hands of the late owner (Mr Vandal) we never precisely knew, though we guessed it was an unredeemed mortgage.

Our removal was attended with considerable inconvenience. Our servants were annoyed at leaving London, and more annoyed at being conveyed to what I heard them call a downright 'penitentshary.' The coachman and footman became friendly for the first time since they had been in our service; the old female cook, presuming on her length of servitude, was rebellious; the two housemaids were sulky and obstinate; my own maid was unusually prim and severe; and

the only one who seemed to enjoy the change was little Waddles, our page.

Every room of our dreary castle was a passage, and every passage was a vault. It looked an imposing place from the outside, with its turrets, its drawbridge, its portcullis, its towers, its moat (which made the lower apartments very damp), its arched doorways, battlements, and little peep-holes of windows; but inside there was not a room—to use a vulgar expression—that you could swing a cat in, if we except the two principal halls, which were like railway tunnels. But the most singular part about it was an old warder, who looked aged enough to have been present when the first stone of the castle was laid. He was very feeble, of course, with rheumatism, and was just one of those old servants—very unlike my servants—whose pride it is to die at their posts. And a nice post it was. A hole in the thick stone wall, like a cell. Call it a porter's lodge, or give it any fine name you will, but you cannot alter the place. It was an unmistakeable cell, worse than many I saw at the model prison, where burglars and such people were humanely confined for their crimes. The old warder's duty was to attend to the portcullis and drawbridge (the only entrance across the moat), and he would allow no one to interfere with him. He had worked that portcullis and that drawbridge before the present generation was born, before the family possessors of Rubble Castle went gradually to the bad, and sold or mortgaged their ancient property, and he was not in the humour to be assisted by our coachman or footman, even if either of those lazy and dissatisfied menials had offered their inexperienced services. The portcullis and drawbridge were old—absurdly old—the machinery was antiquated, rusty, and generally out of order, and the process, in the old warder's hands, of letting any person in or out, was a noisy, creaking performance that lasted nearly half an hour.

There was little time left for moping about, or even thoroughly examining the place, for some of the visitors—whom my husband had invited, with his usual impetuosity, to give the place a warming—were expected early in the course of the next day. We did what we could with mouldy hangings and scanty furniture, made some centuries before upholstery was raised into the dignity of an art; and by the aid of enormous fires roaring up forge-like chimneys, we produced the appearance of comfort, if not the reality. The servants were not at all reconciled to the place upon further acquaintance, and they considered the whole removal as something little better than joining a gang of gipsies. If their situations had not been good, and

their master and mistress had not been indulgent, I believe the whole body would have tendered their resignation without a moment's hesitation.

The first visitors who arrived were Mrs and Miss Gushington, an enthusiastic widow, with her more enthusiastic daughter. They were in raptures with the castle, as I fully expected, and I was very glad of it, as it was a good example to set the servants.

'What a dear, delightful, duck of a place!' almost shouted Mrs Gushington before the first salutations were over.

'And so old, mamma,' interposed the daughter.

'Yes, my dear,' returned the mother, 'so very old. Where did your respected husband pick up such a dear, quaint, feudal relic, Mrs Coggleshall?'

'It was left us as a legacy,' I replied.

'Oh, how charming!' returned Mrs Gushington, with enthusiasm; 'how very charming—so unexpected!'

'Don't you like the middle ages?' asked Miss Gushington, in a tone very similar to her mother.

'Not much,' I answered.

'Oh, I do!' returned the young lady, in a most rapturous manner. 'I think they were so nice!'

'Do you know, Mrs Coggleshall,' said Mrs Gushington, 'what I should call this place if it were mine?'

'Something very pretty, I'm sure, dear,' I returned with politeness.

'The Moated Grange! after Tennyson's poem, you know?'

'Very happy, indeed, mamma,' replied the daughter.

Unfortunately many of our guests were not disposed to exchange the comforts of modern civilization for the barbarity of the middle ages, without an unamiable struggle. Such were old Mr Crowcomb and his wife. They had got the best apartment in the castle—stony, of course—that could not be helped; but a room fit for a king and queen—in the middle ages.

They did not complain direct to me or Mr Coggleshall; but Mrs Crowcomb's maid made frequent application for impossible things in the kitchen. Our servants in their present temper took care to convey this to me, as a hint of their own deplorable condition.

A communication was opened with the neighbouring village (four miles distant) for the purpose of victualling the garrison. Considering the extent and the unusual character of the demand, we were tolerably well served; and it was amusing to see the old warder going

through all the forms of challenging the butcher's boy in his cart on the other side of the moat, as if he had been an invading army. When he came for orders, to save the trouble of letting down the old, cranky drawbridge, they were shouted through a speaking-trumpet thrust through a slit of a window.

The first serious difficulty that I experienced in the victualling department was with the cook, who could find nothing in the shape of kitchen utensils with which she felt disposed to risk her professional reputation before company.

'It's all very well, mim,' she said, 'for born savidges, which was content to eat their meat raw from the points of dadgers, but it won't suit my books.'

I presume that she alluded to the manners and customs of the middle-age barons at their repasts; though I did not inquire further. To get over the difficulty, without more discussion, I took her to the armoury, and made a selection of helmets, breastplates, and a variety of odd metallic things that I knew nothing about, sufficient to set up a cook in business at a public club-house. I knew I was committing sacrilege; but what could I do?

The moat was one of the most obtrusive nuisances that we had to deal with. It was, in parts, half full of a green slimy mud, and we had not been in the castle many hours before we became painfully aware of its existence.

There was no concealing the fact, nor doubting the cause, and the old warder, being the only living link that bound us to the past, was summoned to render an explanation, and suggest a remedy.

'Well, sir,' he said, 'I remember the old moat loike that for more nor fifty year.'

'Yes, yes,' said Mr Coggleshall, interrupting him, 'we want to know the cause.'

'Ah!' said the venerable adjunct of the place, with a chuckle, 'that's more nor you nor I can tell. It cum loike that about a week a'ter old Sir Cleaves died, an' they do say——'

This was sufficient for my husband, who had a special dislike of the old warder's legends, and he dismissed the aged servant without further questioning. The next day we sent to the town for a surveyor—a person not easily found in those parts—and his report (which cost us fifty pounds), could only tell us that, in former times, the moat was supplied with water from a spring; that this spring had dried up from natural causes; that there were no means at hand for abating the nuisance except by boring for water to flush the moat, or by clearing

out the mud altogether. We adopted neither of these expensive suggestions; but temporarily kept off the enemy by a liberal application of chloride of lime.

We had great trouble with our only child, Alexander, aged nine years, who was home for his holidays. He made a companion of little Waddles, our fat page, and together they scaled such giddy heights upon the tower-battlements, that it made everybody's heart sick to see them. When this amusement was denied to them, and the ways of access were closed and guarded to the upper parts of the castle, they let themselves out of an arrow-hole, or window, by a rope into a dry part of the moat, and were lost to the inhabitants of the castle for many hours. When they, at last, applied for re-admission across the drawbridge, they were one mass of dry, light-coloured dirt from head to foot, and they had great difficulty in making themselves known to the old warder. Their story was that a treacherous part of the moat had given way, and plunged them up to their necks in the ancient mud. They had run about the common and the forest until they felt dry and comfortable, and thought they looked decent, when they had presented themselves, a little before dusk, under the notion that they might enter unobserved. Alexander had spoiled a new suit of clothes, and little Waddles had utterly destroyed his livery.

Scarcely had we recovered from this fright when we heard piercing shrieks issuing from the north turret, where Mrs and Miss Gushington had taken up their quarters. If it had not been for the courage of Mr Coggeshall, I believe that no one would have ventured to investigate the cause of these sounds of terror; for Mr Crowcomb distinctly stated that he was neither a hero, nor a crusader, and the servants were already beginning to believe in strange stories of white and red ladies who walked by night with great wounds in their breasts up and down the corridors. Mr Coggeshall, with most praiseworthy promptitude, seized a thick stick, and went direct to the room where Mariana (Miss Gushington) was preparing herself for dinner. He found that young lady with dishevelled hair, crouching in a corner of the room, and staring wildly at two large bats, who were staring at her from two opposite corners. Mr Coggeshall led the romantic young lady out of the room; and, after a short struggle, he put the two animals to flight. It turned out afterwards, that Mariana had opened the turret window to gaze at the rising autumnal moon, when the two brutes flew suddenly in, and nearly knocked her down in their entry.

Two other visitors arrived before we sat down to dinner—the Misses Tutbury, maiden sisters, living on their property; and, at last, after many difficulties in the series of vaults which did duty for the kitchen, the great meal of the day was served at exactly half-past eight p.m. railway time. The repast was plain, but ample,—baronial, in fact, and satisfactory enough, in its way; but the footman and coachman thought proper to wait at table wrapped up as if prepared for a long journey outside a coach. The dress first caught my eye, but I said nothing; and then it caught my husband's eye, who said a great deal.

‘John Thomas and James William,’ Mr Coggleshall shouted across the table, ‘what is the meaning of this?’

There was a little hesitation. Then the footman, although the junior, put himself forward to speak.

‘I knows what it is, sir, to which you eludes, but roomatiz is a thing that will come to us all, sir, sooner or later, an’ it’s wrong, it is, to fly in the face of Providence.’

This speech produced a sympathetic grunt from Mr Crowcomb; but it only enraged Mr Coggleshall still further.

‘Take off that comforter, John Thomas,’ he said, ‘directly; and that ridiculous overcoat; and you, James William, either make yourself a Christian waiter, or leave the work to John Thomas. You’re not driving the Carlisle Highflyer against a north wind!’

‘Werry well, sir,’ replied the coachman, ‘if you wish it; but goin’ hout o’ this warm room—which warm it is compared with those passidges——’

An impatient gesture from Coggleshall stopped any further conversation, and the dinner was finished in silence.

During the afternoon the wind had shifted round to the north, and our position was no protection against the keenness of the blast. Our screen from the south, composed of the bleak hills before mentioned, was perfect; but from the east and the north we had scarcely the shelter of a blade of grass. Leaving the banqueting-hall, as it is called, to go across the dark passage to that other tunnel fitted up as a drawing-room, we all felt that the two men-servants were not so very much to blame.

We retired to rest early that night, only to awake to fresh troubles the next morning. Everybody had, of course, heard strange and unearthly noises during the night (the howling of the wind along the tunnels and passages), and almost every one was full of complaints when we met at breakfast. The two Misses Tutbury had been horrified

by discovering a large owl standing calmly before their toilet-glass on their dressing-table. Unlike Miss Gushington with the bat, they were strong-minded enough to drive it away with an open umbrella. Both Mrs Gushington and her daughter were a little pinched up with cold, and a trifle—just a trifle—less enthusiastic. Mr and Mrs Crowcomb were, of course, sulky, especially Mr Crowcomb; who had shouted for one hour in vain for shaving-water in his lofty chamber in the battlements, there being no bells or communications between any two parts of the building. We had to apologize for many small shortcomings at the breakfast table. Our letters, which came to us very late, contained apologies for being unable to accept our kind invitation from many gentlemen whom we had calculated upon as beaux for the ladies. This is always the case in all parties, whether in town or country; and one note from Mr Hal Fresco was particularly vexing to poor Mariana (Miss Gushington), who I know had come for the express purpose of meeting him at the Castle.

The county paper contained the following paragraph, which Mr Coggleshall read to us:—

‘RUBBLE CASTLE.—We are glad to learn that this interesting, ancient, historical, and local Norman relic, has passed into the hands of Udolpho Coggleshall, Esquire, a gentleman of enlarged views and ample property, in whom we hope to see those baronial glories revived which have so long lain dormant under the icy manners of the late uncongenial proprietor.’

I think my husband felt a little pride at this paragraph; and, if so, it was soon checked by the receipt of a very large claim for poor-rates, which came amongst the letters.

‘A most unjust assessment,’ he exclaimed, ‘and I shall certainly appeal against it. One hundred and twenty pounds for poor-rates! Why, what on earth do they reckon the rent of this’—he checked himself as he was about to say something disrespectful of the place, and added calmly, ‘this castle?’

‘Ah!’ replied old Mr Crowcomb, taking up the conversation, ‘I thought as much. If you will be a baron, Coggleshall, you’ll find you must pay for it?’

We passed the short day in viewing what little was to be seen in the surrounding country; made a pilgrimage to the nearest town—a very poor place in appearance—and returned to the Castle early in the afternoon. When we arrived in the front of the draw-bridge, we noticed two persons in long beards and German hats sketching from different points, and we thought we saw a photographic apparatus

moving off in the distance. A stout, elderly gentleman, in a white necktie, with several other gentlemen of equal age, but of very unequal size, were standing near the place. When Mr Coggleshall made the necessary signal to the warder, the stout gentleman, who appeared to be the elected spokesman of the party, advanced, and said: 'Have I the pleasure of addressing the new proprietor of this noble relic?'

'I am the present proprietor,' returned my husband.

'We are the acting committee of the West Sussex, or B division, of the British Archæological Association,' continued the stout gentleman, who paused for a reply.

'Indeed!' returned my husband, vacantly.

'It is a proud, but an onerous position which you occupy?' continued the stout gentleman, inquiringly.

'I don't exactly understand you, sir,' replied Mr Coggleshall, while we all listened with interest.

'When I say proud,' returned the stout gentleman, 'I mean in owning the roof which once sheltered the great Rufus (called Rufus the pugnosed) after the siege of Mudport; when I say onerous, I mean in reference to what you may do with that roof.'

A murmur of approbation ran through the committee, or deputation, at this speech; and tall gentlemen stooped to whisper to short gentlemen, while short gentlemen stretched themselves to whisper to tall gentlemen.

'I suppose,' replied my husband, 'that I have the usual liberty to deal as I like with my own property?'

'No, sir; pardon me,' returned the stout gentleman, very excitedly, 'not exactly so in this case. If I may be allowed the expression, your country has an historical lien upon these hallowed walls, and we wait upon you, as guardians of local archæological monuments, to satisfy ourselves that the place will receive no injury in your hands.'

'Then, sir,' replied my husband, very coolly, 'with every respect for my country, and the association you so ably represent, I must decline to satisfy you upon that point.'

'You are not the possessor of a vulgar house,' returned the stout gentleman, with much energy; 'you are the recipient of a sacred trust. Remove but one brick of that trust,—desecrate but one stone, and the voice of civilized Europe will be raised in one universal yell of indignation against you?'

The drawbridge, governed by the feeble and ancient warder, had

by this time descended slowly to its place, and we prepared to cross it.

'Good day,' said my husband, turning politely to the stout gentleman and the deputation, who seemed to be astonished at the unsatisfactory result of their spokesman's tact and eloquence.

'Good day, sir,' replied the stout gentleman, raising his hat with dignity. 'Remember your trust: the eyes of your country—of the Archæological Association—are upon you.'

We were disappointed upon our return at not finding an expected visitor, Mr Coggeshall, senior, the father of my husband. He had written to say he would arrive at the railway-station by a certain train, and we had sent the coachman over with a carriage to meet him. The train arrived, but no Mr Coggeshall, and the servant had come back as he went.

Dinner passed over much the same as the day before, except that one of the maids had to wait in the place of John Thomas the footman, who had gone to bed with a violent cold and face-ache. The soup was greasy, and the meat was half-raw, for the cook had become more rebellious, having been without any authoritative supervision during the day. The night was even a little colder than the last, and we retired to our stony chambers, if anything, a little earlier.

In the morning, the first thing that met my eye, as I looked somewhat early out of our window, which commanded a view of the bare country in front of the castle, was a shabby four-wheeled fly, standing immediately opposite the portcullis entrance on the outer side of the moat. Near the fly was a bony horse, endeavouring to graze, and a shabby groom trying to warm himself by dancing, and flinging his hands under his arm-pits. Presently an old gentleman put his head out of the window of the fly, and I at once recognized Mr Coggeshall, senior. I called my husband, and, by the time he reached the window, his father, who was very stout, had with some difficulty reached the ground, and began to make signs towards the castle. Something struck us both, seeing the horse disengaged from the vehicle, that Mr Coggeshall, senior, had passed the night in front of the moat, being unable to make the old warder hear. We at once hastened down to the cell, or lodge, and aroused the venerable servant, who was still sleeping soundly, dreaming, perhaps, of the glories of the past. Mr Coggeshall, who is rather impatient, having assured his father through the speaking-trumpet that his presence was observed, very foolishly ventured to try his hand at the portcullis. Neither he nor the old warder was able to move it. They

both struggled hard ; but the more they struggled the firmer the old barrier kept its place. It soon became evident that some hours might elapse before the passage would be again opened ; and in the mean time Mr Coggleshall, senior, who was, no doubt, tired out with waiting all night, would lose all patience at any further delay. My husband conveyed the melancholy intelligence to his exhausted parent through the speaking-trumpet, and received, in reply, some faint words, the meaning of which was eked out by unmistakeable gestures of indignation. In this position the idea struck my husband, that Mr Coggleshall, senior, might be hauled through the window by which Alexander and little Waddles got into the dry part of the moat.

The proposal having been made to the old gentleman, he seemed reluctantly to give his consent, and walked to the point indicated by his son. He got down the outer bank of the moat, and crossed it with some difficulty, and then came the all-important and heavy task of hauling him up to the window.

By this time most of our visitors had joined us ; and the general opinion seemed to be, that he was a very large and heavy man, and that, when elevated to a level with the small slit of a window-hole, he would never be able to squeeze himself through. After some minutes of suspense, the purple face of Mr Coggleshall, senior, was seen through the aperture ; and it was evident to all that he could be hauled no further in that direction.

‘Udolpho,’ said Mr Coggleshall, senior, with as much indignation as he could command in his peculiar position, ‘what is this ?’

‘I assure you,’ replied my husband, with sorrow and humiliation——

‘Kept out all night,’ interrupted Mr Coggleshall, senior ; ‘and now drawn up by a common rope to a rat-hole ! Try a crane, sir, for your father. Try a crane !’

A sudden twinge of the face-ache, which John Thomas felt at this moment, caused him to let go his hold upon the rope ; and the loss of support sent Mr Coggleshall, senior, gliding rapidly down the castle wall once more into the moat.

We rushed to the battlements, and saw him inciting the shabby groom to put the horse in the fly as quickly as possible ; and, when the vehicle was ready he got into it. Without giving one look towards the castle and his penitent relatives, he drove away in the direction of the neighbouring town.

It was several hours after this event before the portcullis was again raised, my husband standing by in a fretful temper all the

while. The first use he made of his freedom was to take a horse, and gallop after his father. It was quite dusk when he returned; but the old gentleman was not with him, having started for London by another road. Mr Coggleshall, senior, had missed the station when he came down by going to sleep in the carriage, and had had to retrace his lost ground by an up-train. This brought him to the required point at a late hour of the night, and he had hired a fly to bring him over to the castle. When he arrived in front of the moat, everything was perfectly still; and, as both he and the driver could find nothing but very small stones to throw at the portcullis, they failed to arouse the old warder, and had to encamp for the night. He positively refused to be reconciled to his son until he took steps to dispose of his barbarous legacy.

‘Which,’ said my husband, ‘I have determined to do; for, though an Englishman’s house may be his castle, an Englishman’s castle will not always do for his house.’

THE AFFLICTED DUKE OF SPINDLES.



NOW thyself; examine thyself; keep a strict watch over thyself; for thy body is a frail machine that will soon fall to pieces, if not carefully preserved. From the head downwards, or the feet upwards, thou art subject to disease, deformity, and decay. Thy hair will drop off,—will change colour,—will turn gray. Thy teeth will become unsightly, black, hollow, aching. Thy back will become round-shouldered, and thy elbows will stick outwards instead of inwards. Thy hands will become coarse, red, short, thick; thy nails grubby. Thy stomach will protrude beyond the natural space allotted to man, and thy waist will assume unwieldy dimensions. Thy legs, unable to support unyieldingly the superincumbent weight, will bow out at the calves, or bend inwards at the knees. Thy feet will become painfully fruitful in corns and bunions, and thy face at one extremity of thy miserable body will fall into graceless contortions in sympathy with the pain which thou art suffering at the other extremity. Thy complexion will lose its brilliant purity under sun, and rain, and hail, and snow, and frost, and those darting eyes of which thou art so justly—but, alas! so vainly—proud, will become, under the combined effects of dust and east wind, a couple of weak and watery organs, encompassed by a rim

of inflammatory cuticle. As to thy heart, thy liver, and all the other sacred mysteries ever closely hidden within the perishable casket, are they not more delicate and wonderful in their silent retirement—more prone to suffer derangement and decay—than those ruder portions of the same weak machine, whose place it is to come in immediate contact with the rough elements of the outer world?

Such were my thoughts, a curious mixture of the styles of philosophical reflection peculiar to the pulpit and the advertising nostrum vendor, in the early part of a dull, melancholy October day. I was that Pariah of society, the man about city and town, when city and town were nothing but a lifeless desert. The hard necessities of the law required my presence for an uncertain period to sign deeds, and perform other acts connected with the conveyance of a large business property, and I was chained by this legal spell within sight and call of Mr Proviso, the lawyer, at a period of the year when every other living creature of my class was disporting himself upon mountain and river, lake and sandy beach. I wandered moodily up the once gay and busy thoroughfares, now gay and busy no longer with the rolling carriages and the brilliant members of the promenade. I passed my once comfortable, exclusive tavern, and found it in the hands of bricklayers' labourers, with huge white-washing ladders standing in the principal rooms, and planks projecting from the open windows into the street. I looked in the newspapers for topics of interest, and found them not. I wandered with a strange fascination towards those large, dark, silent houses, whose hospitable doors had once been open to me at all hours of the day. I saw, for one fleeting moment, the beaming face of a young male friend within the hooded recesses of a Hansom cab. I rushed forward to stay his progress, but my eye quickly detected the too expressive rug and portmanteau upon the top under the driver's elbows, and I drew back, suffering the vehicle to go unmolested on its joyous way, leaving me in a solitude more depressing than ever. Listless and aimless, as I sauntered up one dull street and down another, I became painfully conscious, perhaps for the first time, of my very limited power of self-dependence. I began to commune with myself, and see how helpless and wretched a thing I was, when society was suddenly and completely taken from me. I began to know myself, and I did not appear to improve upon acquaintance. The more I carried on this self-examination, the more contemptible did I appear in my own eyes. For years I had gone placidly on in ignorance of my mental and moral weakness; what if my physical condition had been silently deteriorating? This idea led me into the

reflections before recorded, and partly from fear, partly from curiosity, and partly for occupation, I resolved to get as much information about myself as talent could furnish and money purchase.

The first step that I took with the view of knowing myself, was to ring at the door of an eminent chiropodist. He was within, of course, as it was his business to be. I was conducted by a footman in a splendid livery, up a noble staircase into a drawing-room, furnished with all—and a little more of—the glass and satin that taste has ordained to be necessary for the proper fitting up of such an apartment. A luxurious easy-chair was placed for me near the table in the centre of the room, and I was mildly and deferentially told that the professor would be with me in a few minutes. In the mean time I was left to contemplate his portraits as he appeared while extracting the corns of three crowned heads—or rather six crowned feet—of Europe, and those of an Eastern monarch, who, from his undoubted Arab origin, ought never to have been troubled with shoes, much less with corns. When these works of art had had their proper destined effect upon my mind, the professor—a coarse, fat man—entered, arrayed in a crimson velvet dressing-gown, with a smoking-cap to match. I rose to greet him, but he bounded forward with an air of what was meant to be charming amiability and consideration for my bodily sufferings, and begged that I would on no account disturb myself.

‘My dear sir,’ he began, ‘I have seen too many cases of your kind not to know how extremely grateful a little rest must be. Allow me to take off your boots and socks.’

He placed a small black velvet cushion for me to rest my feet upon, and, in a few seconds, those supposed suffering members were exposed to his view.

‘Ah,’ he exclaimed, ‘the very thing I expected; exactly the same as the young Duke of Spindles, who was here the other day! Do you know his grace?’

I replied that I did not.

‘A very affable young nobleman,’ he continued, pinching my toes with his fore-finger and thumb, ‘extraordinarily so, when we consider what his grace must have suffered with his feet before his grace came to me. I think, sir, that I extracted from his grace’s right foot, alone, in a single morning, no less than five and forty corns of different degrees of magnitude!’

I exhibited a polite degree of astonishment.

‘Yes, sir,’ he resumed, ‘and I did more than that. I cured his grace of one of the most awful bunions that has ever come under my

notice during a long and active professional career. "Cure me of that bunion," said his grace, "and you will earn my everlasting gratitude. It embitters my youth, it darkens the festive board, it gnaws me like a vulture, it comes between me and the legitimate pleasures of the ball-room, which I am so well fitted by age, appearance, and position to enjoy." I put out my talent, sir, and his grace went away another man. The hundred guineas that his grace presented me with were soon spent, but the diamond-ring that he gave me I shall preserve and wear, by his grace's desire, to the last day of my life.'

He displayed a ring.

'His grace must have been peculiarly afflicted,' I observed.

'Not at all, sir; not at all. In fact, between ourselves, corns and bunions are the great curse of our aristocracy. Not one of that illustrious body is free from them, male or female. It is an infallible sign of blood.'

While this conversation, or rather broken monology, was going on, the manipulation of my feet continued, and small pea-looking lumps of some drab material were, from time to time, placed upon a silver salver standing on the table.

'You must be a person of extraordinary fortitude,' he resumed, 'to have endured what you must have endured, for so long a period. Are you aware that I have already extracted thirty-two corns from your feet?'

I was not aware of the fact.

'This,' he observed, taking one of the peas from the salver, 'is what causes the pain in the foot. It is the seed, or needle of the corn, which, being pressed down by the boot, enters that portion of the flesh which is not benumbed or hardened, and produces that sharp, pricking pain, popularly known as "shooting."'

The professor rose with a look of triumphant satisfaction, and I replaced my socks and boots.

'There,' he exclaimed, as I stood up once more, 'you feel another man now, and will walk down-stairs very differently from the way in which you walked up them.'

I certainly did walk away differently, for I was thirty-two pounds lighter. Each corn or pea was charged a sovereign, and thirty-two pounds was the cost of my first lesson in the difficult art of knowing myself.

The next place that I found myself in was the depôt for the sale of the celebrated boot; where I must have wandered, though uncon-

sciously, thinking of my feet. I was received by the master of the shop with tenderness almost approaching to affection, and I marvelled much that any mere money-payment could purchase so much real and unaffected kindness. My feet were handled with considerate care, and their measure was taken as if they had been made of the most delicate glass.

‘Dear, dear,’ exclaimed the proprietor and inventor—a short, puffy man, whose face was now very red from his stooping position—‘you ought to have come to me before; if you had gone another month, sir, under the old system of boots—only another month, sir, you would have been a hopeless cripple!’

‘Indeed,’ I replied.

‘It was only the other day that the young Duke of Spindles——’

‘I beg your pardon,’ I interrupted, ‘what name?’

‘The young Duke of Spindles,’ he returned. ‘It was only the other day that he came to me in such a condition, that if I had not known my business, sir, his grace would have hobbled on crutches for the remainder of his life.’

‘Was he grateful?’ I inquired.

‘Sir,’ said the proprietor and inventor rather pompously, ‘his grace presented me with that letter of acknowledgment hanging over your head, and this diamond ring, which he begged me to wear for his sake.’

As I paid my money—no inconsiderable sum—and left the place my benefactor begged that I would not walk too much for the next month, and that I would take a bran foot-bath at least three times a-week. I had learned and paid for lesson number two, and, in trying to know myself, I was beginning to understand my neighbours.

I next found myself in the studio of a photographic artist, whose portraits were celebrated for their happy fidelity. He prided himself on being a remarkably plain-speaking man—a man who never flattered any one, no matter what his rank and influence might be. After spending some time in arranging my posture, he expressed his dissatisfaction with me in these terms:

‘Your face, sir, is quite out of drawing; your nose inclines considerably to the left side; and, to make matters worse, your right cheek is half as large again as the left.’

‘You’re not very complimentary,’ I replied.

‘Sir,’ said he, ‘I always give my visitors a candid opinion. It was only the other day that I nearly offended the young Duke of Spindles——’

‘The Duke of——?’

‘Spindles, sir. The Duke of Spindles was not offended, sir, by the bluntness of my remarks, in telling him that if his head was only as well-proportioned as his legs and feet, he would have been a perfect Apollo Belvidere. His grace, however, after a little while, had the good sense to admit the justice of my criticism, and he is now one of the firmest patrons that I have.’

This was another stage gained in self-knowledge. The next step carried me to the shop of an artist celebrated for his skill in adorning the human frame with clothes.

‘May I inquire,’ asked the artist, mildly, ‘who made your last garments?’

‘Certainly,’ I replied, and I gave him the required information.

‘I thought so,’ he returned, addressing himself to a prim man who was cutting out cloth behind a counter; ‘some more of their failures, Jenkins!’

‘Yes, sir,’ was the mechanical response.

‘Scarcely a day passes, sir,’ he said, turning to me, ‘but what I have a customer from that quarter. My best patron—the young Duke of ——’ (‘Spindles,’ I could not help interpolating)—‘came to me in that way, didn’t he, Jenkins?’

‘Yes, sir,’ replied the prim cutter.

‘We must pad your coat considerably behind,’ resumed the master artist; ‘for, although you may not be aware of it, your shoulder-blades are very prominent; so much so as almost to reach a deformity, which it is our business to hide. As you have a decided tendency to corpulence, your waistcoat must be single-breasted, and your trowsers must be made full, to conceal a little inclination inwards at the knees. But’ (he continued, rising into enthusiasm with his subject), ‘as I said to his grace the young Duke of Spindles, the other day, if it was not for these little deflections of the human frame, where would be our Art? We might as well, sir, be common slop-sellers?’

Still endeavouring to acquire the power of knowing myself, another half-hour found me closeted with the renowned Doctor Grampus, who had evidently formed himself on the traditional model of the equally renowned Doctor Abernethy. The doctor—who was the consulting physician of several life assurance offices—in addition to his gruffness, had acquired a habit of treating patients as if they were under an examination for a policy.

‘Now, sir!’ said he, ‘what’s the matter with *you*? Pork chops?’

I explained to him briefly the object of my visit, which was to gain a general knowledge of my health and bodily prospects.

‘Was your father ever mad?’ he inquired.

‘Never.’

‘Mother?’

‘Never.’

‘Both dead?’

‘Both.’

‘Age?’

‘Between fifty and sixty.’

‘Both?’

‘Both.’

‘Good! Had the measles?’

‘Yes.’

‘Come here!’

I went as requested, and received a sharp punch in the stomach from the fist of the doctor, whose head was immediately stuck against my waistband, listening, as it appeared to me, to the ticking of my watch.

‘Breathe!’ he said, and I obeyed.

‘You’ll do,’ he continued, ‘if you don’t drink too much. Five guineas!—Come in.’

Although I had heard no sound, a footman entered, in obedience to the last summons, and announced the young Duke of Spindles.

‘Back surgery,’ replied the concise doctor. As I bowed myself out I saw no signs of a ducal presence, although I looked curiously—and thus ended my fifth lesson.

I next rang the bell at a door on which was a large brass plate with ‘Madame Dubois, épileuse,’ upon it in prominent characters. I was ushered into a room in many respects like the chiropodist’s, where I was received by a middle-aged female, who desired me to take a seat while she prepared the necessary implements to extract my gray hairs. She commenced her operations with two pair of pincers.

‘Milor’s hair was vara fine—vara charming—much like de air of de young Duc de——’

‘Don’t mention his name. I know it already.’

‘Monsieur?’

‘Spindles. Am I right?’

‘Parfaitement. Milor le young Duc is just a leetle—a vara leetle—gray; but he had taken it in time, and it would not spread—O no!’

Half-an-hour passed in this way, at the end of which time some twenty hairs were displayed upon a white cloth on the table. Two were visibly gray, the others were said to be in a state of transition—dangerous companions, likely to corrupt the remainder of the flock if suffered to remain. I paid the fee cheerfully—three guineas and a half—and went direct to a barber's to pursue my investigations in the same direction.

The barber's was not a vulgar barber's; not a place with a pole sticking out, and an old copy of a Sunday paper to amuse the customers, but an establishment that had kept pace with the times, if it had not shot a-head of them. It was a series of saloons, replete with every luxury of the toilet; artists of rare manipulative skill; baths of every kind, even warm sea-water baths. I placed myself before a pier-glass, and was immediately waited on by the leading man in the house, who prepared a shampooing mixture, not unlike the materials for a pancake. There were eggs, and rum and water, and a thing like a milking-pail, in which the composition was to drip as it ran off my head. When the washing was finished, the usual remarks began on the part of my operator.

'Hair is grayer than it ought to be, sir, for a gentleman of your age. Falling off a little at the top, too. You should try our warm sea-water baths. Did you ever try our pediluvium, fragrant vapour, and siesta to follow?'

'Never,' I replied, 'but as you recommend the warm sea-water baths, I'll try one.'

'Yes, sir; thank you, sir. Thomas!' (this was shouted down a pipe) 'warm sea-water.'

I was conducted to a dark apartment in the basement—probably what was once the cellar, now lighted with gas—and in the corner I observed a large trough filled with the invigorating spring. When I was thoroughly immersed, I was left to my reflections, and very melancholy they were. I compared my condition, confined in a dirty tank, in a gloomy coal-cellar, with that of my friends, who were taking their sea-water under the chalk cliffs, on the free, open, pebbly beach. I audibly cursed the delays of the law which kept me in town, and I became an ardent legal reformer from that hour. As these thoughts were passing through my mind, I became suddenly conscious of an intense feeling of disgust at my bath, and the whole truth at once dawned upon me, I was soaking in a mess of pot-liquor. Sea-water it was certainly, but it had been several days—perhaps weeks—in the wood, and several hours—perhaps days—in the boiler.

Its whole history passed before me ; its transfer to a cask on the coast of Kent or Sussex ; its journey to London in the luggage-van of the railway ; its period of delay in the company's store-houses ; its jolting voyage in one of Pickford's vans ; its second delay at the carrier's warehouses ; finally, its delivery at the door of the hair-dresser. Ten legs of pork, stewed for six hours in ten gallons of water, would have made a bath as wholesome and inviting. I leaped with a shudder from the greasy pool, and lost no time in making my way to the upper apartments. I had spent the whole day, and nearly fifty pounds, in learning to know myself ; and in the effort I had but extended my knowledge of a certain class of my fellow-creatures. As I passed through the saloons where the 'pediluvium, fragrant vapour, and siesta to follow' were administered, I heard the voice of one who was evidently indulging in these Eastern luxuries, crying aloud in a decided tone—evidently under the impression that there was something which the waiter had omitted to bring :

'Now, then ! That siesta !'

Could that voice have belonged to the young, shadowy, afflicted Duke of Spindles ?

THE SHOP-SIDE OF ART.

I.



THE earth is full of couples who are made for each other, not only of couples whose destiny it is to love, but of those whose destiny it is to hate. For every spider there is created a fly ; for every cat a mouse ; for every bird a worm ; for every innocent bill-holder a more innocent bill-acceptor ; and for every picture-dealer a picture-buyer. It is doubtful if that favourite target of small divines—the world—could be kept suspended in mid-air without such a provision of nature, and, therefore, if we record the habits and manners of antagonistic races, let us do it with so little party-feeling, and so much philosophical calmness, that something like the truth may be arrived at.

II.

Though Mr Huggin was born some twenty years before Mr Eizak Sleman came into existence, yet the latter gentleman was evidently destined to exert a peculiar influence over the former. The start that

Mr Huggin got in life over Mr Sleman, seemed only to have been used in preparing for that gentleman's appearance. If money was accumulated by Mr Huggin—and it *was* accumulated—in a business so unpictorial as the tallow-trade, it was allowed to grow in all its rank luxuriance, until Mr Sleman presented himself to pluck it.

III.

In tracing the rise and progress of Mr Eizak Sleman, we are struck by the many changes which a single name may undergo. The father of Mr Sleman thought proper to sign himself Salamans, while another son gently changed his title to Slayman; a second to Sloman; and a third to Sleighman. The vowels are very accommodating. Another branch of the same family—an uncle of the subject of our sketch—went even further, and by adding 'Van' to one end of his name, and the letter 'n' to the other, he came out as Mr Van Slemann. Without going into the question of how far individual taste may have had an influence in these changes, there is no doubt that they were found remarkably useful in all matters of business.

Young Eizak Sleman (or Solomons) was born in a mingled atmosphere of horses and art. If he had come into the world only ten years earlier, he might have found himself cradled in a low gaming-house; and ten years before that—about the time that Mr Huggin was born—he might have wondered what took his father away for exactly seven years and a half—neither more nor less. As it was, however, he first saw the light in an obscure bye-street, and in a low brown shop, where betting-books had scarcely been driven out, and Holy Families (painted in oil) had hardly been gathered in. As he grew a little older, and able to use his eyes, he found that his father's permanent stock-in-trade was a large treacly portrait, much cracked, of a woman in a ruff, a couple of bronze candlesticks, a few pieces of dusty old china, some empty picture-frames, and a parchment-coloured statuette of a figure that had no head, only half an arm, and one leg that wanted a foot. These things were always displayed in a coal-hole kind of gloom, and were never disturbed, either by buyer or seller.

As Eizak Sleman grew older still, and able to use his mind as well as his eyes, he was gradually taught some of the secrets of his father's business. He had the pleasure of seeing that business increase, and of learning the main principles upon which it was conducted. A thing of beauty is a joy for ever, was old Salaman's maxim, but only if you know how to deal with it.

The first step was to get the thing of beauty—the Holy Family, or the Head of the Madonna, as the case might be—and then to carefully prepare it as bait for the trap. This picture was never one of those manufactured masses of paint and varnish that are popularly supposed to be produced, in any quantity, in certain garrets, and to be baked and smoked in any quantity, in certain ovens and kitchen chimneys. The class of buyers that old Salamans angled for were persons of some intelligence, some taste, much wealth, more vanity and cupidity, and a little judgment. These hucksters—for hucksters they were—could not be deceived by copies a week old, even if copyists of sufficient talent were to be drawn from more profitable work upon tenth-rate original pictures, or the reproduction of the modern masters. The common instinct of trade was against this form of fraud. If the well-known worm-eaten wood, or the peculiar canvas of the old masters could be successfully imitated; what inducement would there be to exert this extra ingenuity, when a hundred safer and cheaper contemporary copies are to be found in the market?

The chief works, then, that Eizak Sleman's father was always endeavouring to secure were pictures painted by those few earnest pupils who had sat at the living feet of the old masters. Sometimes the eyes of the masters had rested approvingly upon these works, sometimes their hands had kindly given them a touch of grace, beyond the reach of the humble student of art. It may be that amongst these nameless students were many who strove hard to create something that the world should cherish, and who sank to rest with a faint hope that they had accomplished their task. The power of piercing into the distant future, was kindly withheld from them, and they were spared the pain of seeing their images of beauty mellowed with age, encrusted with a thousand falsehoods, and patronized by greasy touters in low sale-rooms. If the bitter destiny of their lofty labour could have been unfolded to them, they would surely have destroyed their handiwork, and the great Sleman family would have been fed only upon those coarse contemporary imitations that were openly painted and sold in the lifetime of the masters by hucksters who knew no guile.

The elder Salamans, however, did not confine his dealings to the stray pictures of antiquity, but he became a patron of living art. He found out many British artists whose necessities were slightly in advance of their income, and while he played the Samaritan, he made many presentable additions to his pictorial stock. With these productions, and the pupil-pictures before described, which required very little manipulation to transform them into safe, current specimens of

the genuine masters; a mass of framed and unframed rubbish was freshened up, and a catalogue prepared of a high-class periodical sale. This sale was always largely supported by contributions from the great Salamans' family; by pictures from 'Slayman and Co.' (the eldest son) of Polyglot Square; by bronzes and articles of *vertu* from Humphrey 'Sloman' (the second son) of Cameo Court, Oxford Street; and by more 'charming' pictorial productions from 'Sleighman and Sleighman' (the third son) of Sligo Buildings, City. The sale always took place at the auction-rooms of Mr Van Slemann (the brother of the elder Salamans), which were situated in a prominent part of Mudgate Hill, the chief thoroughfare of London. These rooms were very gay and enticing in front, very small and dark in the interior, and very crowded with a 'choice collection of ancient and modern paintings.' The safest flowers of this collection were placed in accessible positions, and in curious lights, while the sign-board and tea-board productions, a rather large majority of the stock, were turned, as if in shame, with their faces to the wall. They wanted nothing to set them off that a certain electro-plated taste could give them in the shape of frames, and if swelling lumps of gilding, rose-wood cases, and faultless plate-glass would make great paintings, then these must have been very great, indeed.

On the morning of the sale, or the attempted sale, about half an hour before the official arrival of the auctioneer, a little crowd was always collected on Mudgate Hill, turning over the fluttering leaves of the catalogues that were nailed upon green-baize boards at the doorway, or looking at the great picture with which the trap was baited on that particular occasion, and which was displayed so as to catch the eye of passers-by at the single window in front. The greatest part of this crowd consisted of dummy-bidders, a number of middle-aged men, who were made up to play a part in such a manner, that they ought not to have deceived a child. A ragged-edged yellow collar on a starch-caked yellow shirt; a high black stock, worn just a little threadbare at the sides; a well-brushed, thin black dress-coat, and rather shiny black trousers, that would bear no violent exercise; a well-cleaned pair of mended blucher boots; and a pair of ragged cotton gloves, are not the costume usually worn by wealthy collectors of art. Yet these were the men to the number of nearly a dozen, who were supposed to be regardless of money when a Rubens or a Correggio came in their way; and who, if not investing for themselves, were the confidential agents of Lord Mumblepeg, a devoted buyer of pictures, who was prevented by paralysis from attending

personally at the sales. Poor wretches; they looked, with their clean-shaven, melancholy faces, as if the slightest whispered invitation to a substantial dinner at a snug, warm city tavern would have thrown them off their balance, and have caused them to fly, like a cloud of swallows, from the barren feast of paint.

Inside the auction-trap were the other members of the gang, the sprinkling of eager, confederate dealers; the four or five porters, who were probably 'junior partners,' and who looked like prize-fighters, and the usual number of 'picture agents.' As soon as a promising stranger entered the room, it was the business of one of these latter men to fasten on him, and explain the beauties and defects of the collection under sale. It must always be delightful to a man of refinement, to have such agreeable guides at his elbow, and to overlook their flavour of onions, tobacco, and stale clothes in admiration of their intense appreciation of art. There can, of course, be nothing to jar the most sensitive nerves in hearing a thick, hoarse, sponging-house voice enlarging upon the minute rendering of the crown of thorns, or in seeing a thick, black, grubby finger, half hooped with brassy rings, employed in pointing out the hidden touches of the agony in the garden. These picture-dealers certainly assume a very low standard of intellect in their patrons when they take no more trouble than this in selecting their confederates.

The sales at Mr Van Slemann's were not entirely supported by family contributions, but were swollen by many 'noble works,' and 'religious subjects,' that were sent by other traders of a similar stamp. A fine of two shillings and sixpence upon every lot was found sufficient to cover the expenses upon these consignments, and pay the auctioneer a trifle for his trouble. When the sale of a high-priced picture to an ignorant but greedy purchaser did really occur, as it sometimes did, the transaction was saddled with, and able to bear, a commission of a very princely character. No man ever entered those rooms, or even peeped in at the window, who was not followed, and whose position in society was not thoroughly learnt, if he looked like, or promised to bud into, an innocent picture buyer. He may have been astonished to find that the pictorial treasures of his mansion were known to numbers of unsightly men, like sheriff's officers. He may have been astonished to find that after he had inquired about a landscape or a tavern scene, at the shop of 'Slayman and Co.,' his hall table was loaded the next morning with Claudes and Teniers from 'Sleighman and Sleighman's' that had been left for his examination and approval by a strange man, a strange woman, or even a strange boy. He may

have been astonished to find that his steps had been dogged from a print-shop; and that when he wanted a little advice about a picture to guide his not very reliable judgment, the owner of the property seemed to know where he had applied for that advice, if not the exact words of the advice that had been given. He would have been more astonished, if he had not 'bled freely,' to find himself the purchaser of a fine, old, crusted collection of Italian saints, and half-a-dozen sturdy witnesses springing out of the ground, who had each and all a distinct recollection that he had promised to pay two thousand guineas for them. If he gave any indications that, with proper care and management, he was likely to become that sallow-faced, wild-eyed spectre, the collector who would 'bleed to death,' a net was woven round him from which there was little chance of escape; he was fed with nothing but what was likely to encourage his one idea; and he was never deserted until he was reduced to madness, or to a mere fruitless husk.

This is the great victim that every art huckster is always searching for, and who he knows is existing for him in some hidden corner of the world. His shops—his family organization—his 'knock out' combinations—his delusive sales—are nothing but ingenious devices to employ his time, compared with the great mission of his life, the necessity for finding this victim in the crowd.

These were the experiences and the teachings that were constantly before young Eizak Sleman as he grew to be a man; and when he attained that period of life, of course he became a picture-dealer.

IV.

And what had Mr Huggin been doing for the last five-and-twenty years to prepare himself for the slaughter? Beyond the fact already recorded that he had made money, and a good deal of money, in the tallow trade, he seemed to have reached the age of five-and-forty without being much the wiser for it.

His business was not sufficient to occupy his mind, and he wished to be known as something more than a successful merchant. There are many men who have a similar ambitious weakness.

He lived, from trading necessity, in the northern town, whose society had much of the Scottish pride of birth, and very little professed respect for riches. If Mr Huggin had been single, this aristocratic haughtiness might doubtless have been softened, but as he was married, and had no children, there was little inducement to make it less hard than pride of ancestry ought, of course, to be. In vain did

Mr Huggin avail himself of the new philological lights, and trace his unpretending surname up to a Scandinavian god. His dinners were eaten, but eaten with silent contempt.

It was while suffering under this galling treatment, that, being unable to write a book or shake the senate, he formed the melancholy idea of setting up as a person of taste. He proceeded very gently, almost imperceptibly at first, as a man with his trading instincts and the knowledge of the value of money would naturally do, but by degrees he gained courage, or found that timidity was worse than useless in the art-collecting world. He deserted his prints and etchings, his Antonios and Bolswerts, for paintings of various qualities and many schools. He employed a provincial picture-dealer pretty constantly in commissions, a rude practitioner, like a country barber, with no more honesty than the great Salaman family, but with hardly a fraction of their keenness and experience. This man was so clumsy in his operations, and so greedy of present profit, that he would have nipped the most promising innocent purchaser in the bud. Before, however, he could succeed in disgusting the mind and opening the eyes of Mr Huggin, that gentleman was carried out of his reach for a time by important business in town.

v.

It was about this period that the death of Sir Saffron Hill, the great collector and connoisseur, was announced. Sir Saffron Hill had excited the envy and admiration of his tribe for more than half a century. The envy was bestowed upon his collection; the admiration upon his judgment. He was supposed to possess everything that was unique and valuable; he was supposed to know the imposition from the genuine thing at a single glance. If he declared a picture to be by the divine Raffaele, it was considered warranted; if he refused to say that a group of plump beauties were by the earthly Rubens, their reputation was considered to be hopelessly blasted. He had been heard to utter some contemptuous remarks about Guido, and Holy Venuses fell at once to a discount in the market. His opinion was sought even beyond the realms of high art, and he was sometimes asked to place his hand on the brown back of a violin, and to tell its trembling owner if it was really a Straduarious.

Sir Saffron Hill lived a lonely life in one of the old squares, with nothing but his beloved collection and a few vulgar, unsympathetic servants round him. If the latter had not been vulgar and unsympathetic, he would not have considered his smaller treasures so secure

in their keeping. He was very unwilling to show his collection, and was a miser, in every sense of the word, although it has been the fashion never to associate this character with anything but money.

One evening, after dinner, Sir Saffron Hill was discovered dead in his easy-chair, with his latest purchase, a small piece of palissy-ware, on the hearth-rug before him. There was abundance of dusty Utrecht velvet, tortoiseshell buhl, lapis-lazuli, ebony, Sevres porcelain, oil-colour gems, and water-colour jewels, at his side and at his back, while a bust of one of the Cæsars, nearly over his head, seemed to be making faces at another Cæsar opposite, as if nothing had happened.

The death was rather welcomed by the art world than otherwise, as it promised to disperse a very large and valuable collection. The late unrivalled connoisseur had died without a will, and the two discarded children, a boy and girl, who came forward to claim the property, were not disposed either by education or by circumstances to retain it in its art form. A dozen hammers were trembling with eagerness, but the choice fell upon Messrs Crystal and Ransom, the eminent auctioneers, and they received the usual instructions.

VI.

For days you could hardly get near the celebrated auction-rooms in Plush Street, St Coutts's, to view this magnificent released collection. The crowd was so great, and so mixed, that many persons of authority said it was like going to court. The Countess of Dura was seen struggling between Mr Barrington from Whitechapel (*alias* 'Duffing Jemmy') and a leading member of the great Salamans' family. The Duke of Majolica had his hat knocked over his patrician eyes. The street was full of carriages, cabs, and go-carts, and the spotless auctioneers were accused of favouring certain visitors by letting them in through a back skylight.

The second day's sale served to tone down this enthusiasm a little, and on the third day Mr Huggin was passing by chance and found his way into the centre of the auction-room.

'Lot ninety-five,' continued the auctioneer, rapidly, 'An Interior—Van Pothaus—two figures at window—beautiful effect of pipe-light—credit alike to artist and collector—shall we say one hundred pounds?'

Two—three—five—ten hundred pounds were quickly offered from various parts of the crowd.

'Thousan' guinis,' cried the eldest of the Salamans' family, Mr Slayman, 'and Co.'

‘One thousand and eighty pounds,’ exclaimed a feeble little gentleman in spectacles.

‘One thousand and eighty pounds,’ repeated the auctioneer.

‘Let Slayman ’av’ it,’ shouted the venerable father of the Salamans’ family.

‘Mr Salamans,’ said the auctioneer, sternly, ‘I must beg that you will abstain from interrupting the sale.’

The sale went on, and a tall, severe-looking, middle-aged gentleman, in a white neck-tie, secured the picture with a solemn inclination of his head, and a commanding wave of his hand, for fifteen hundred pounds.

‘Lord Eikey Drummond, I think?’ said the auctioneer’s clerk, as he recorded the purchaser’s name.

The solemn inclination of the head was slowly repeated, and the Salamans’ family looked as if they had made the acquaintance of a new picture-buyer, before unknown to them.

Mr Huggin witnessed all this in silent amazement. He had read a few books that took the purple-bloom view of art, but not sufficient to turn his brain, and at present his chief touchstone of merit in a picture was the two-foot rule. The Van Pothaus he had just seen sold for such a considerable sum was no larger than many works he had got at home, which he fully believed he had bought with the rarest taste and judgment. He saw more lots disposed of to buyers who had little knowledge of their own to guide them, and who took the well-advertised character of the late Sir Saffron Hill, as a guarantee in every way sufficient for the value of the paintings. The Salamans’ family looked on, bought nothing, and gained some useful information about buyers. Mr Huggin looked on, and thought he saw his way, while gaining the reputation of a person of taste, to work a wonderful field for profitable investment. He bought a few more volumes upon the purple-bloom view of art, which he read, and mixed up with his shop-view of the subject. When he had settled down once more in his northern city he was in as fit a state as any collector could ever be to be tapped by a judicious picture-dealer.

VII.

When Eizak Sleman started in business, he showed himself to be a picture-dealer by birth, as well as by apprenticeship. He lost no time in fulfilling his mission. This mission was to find an untapped innocent purchaser of the highest class—a purchaser whom he knew to be waiting for him—somewhere.

The promising buyers who had turned up at the sale of the late Sir Saffron Hill's collection, had been secured by his brothers, and other labourers in the same vineyard. Lord Eikey Drummond had fallen to his father; and though he felt that he could have made more of his lordship, the duty due from a son to a parent forbade him interfering in their transactions.

This position drove him, in some measure, into the country; and he tried a plan, well-known in the trade, which had something of the prospecting-rod about it. He took a small and well-assorted stock of pictures into certain leading provincial towns, situated in the midst of the landed or wealthy gentry. As the drummer in attendance upon the Punch and Judy show always beats a few notes upon his instrument to draw the children to the nursery windows, so did Mr Eizak Sleman pitch his tent in each town, and endeavour to draw out the local patrons of art, by a travelling picture sale. He sometimes said the sale was by order of the sheriff, which looked official. He sometimes gave out that the collection belonged to a gentleman in the neighbourhood, whose pecuniary difficulties had become too great to be borne. This stimulated curiosity, which brought an audience; and it was rare, indeed, if the auction passed off without something being sold at a handsome profit.

The enterprising picture-dealer pursued this plan for months—the summer months—without meeting with a promising victim. He had pushed himself, stage by stage, far into the land, and had just concluded an unsuccessful sale in a very dull but substantial northern town. He had retired, rather depressed, to his hotel, when he was told that a gentleman wished to see him. The proper couple had found each other at last. The gentleman was Mr Huggin.

VIII.

Five years soon flew by after this interview at the hotel, and Mr Huggin, to all appearance, had 'bled' very freely. His walls were covered with paintings from garret to cellar—with 'noble works,' 'delicious productions,' 'religious subjects,' and warranted 'master-pieces.' Mrs Huggin turned up her eyes when she looked at these treasures, shrugged her shoulders, and said nothing. Women are so odd. Mr Huggin believed that the mantle of the late Sir Saffron Hill had descended upon his shoulders; and as he had impressed his neighbours with the same belief, he was supremely happy.

Mr Eizak Sleman often made his appearance at Huggin Hall with a quantity of luggage; and he was always welcomed by the pro-

prietor. When he left, after staying a night in the mansion, he had seldom anything more than a carpet-bag to take down to the station.

‘Blessed if ever I see sich a man as you,’ said Mr Sleman to his innocent purchaser, over the dinner-table; ‘you know a sight more about picturs than I do, a’tho’ I’ve bin in ’em all my life!’

‘P’raps so,’ returned Mr Huggin, evidently gratified, ‘p’raps so; I generally understand anything that I give my mind to.’

‘You ought to be in my place,’ continued the picture-dealer, in a thick, hoarse voice, ‘an’ I in yourn.’

‘I might fill your place, Mr Sleman,’ replied Mr Huggin, with pompous dignity, ‘but it doesn’t by any means follow that you could fill mine.’

‘No more it don’t,’ said the picture-dealer, suddenly convinced; ‘no more it don’t. I’m no use to you, I can see.’

Mr Eizak Sleman’s visits to Huggin Hall were always made to effect a sale, but sometimes, as a matter of policy, he attempted to repurchase.

‘You know Lord Eikey Drummond?’ asked Mr Sleman.

‘I’ve seen his lordship in public,’ answered Mr Huggin.

‘About that Teniers: he’s mad a’ter it, an’ don’t mind three hundred pund.’

‘I’m sorry for his lordship.’

‘You on’y giv’ me two for it, yer know.’

‘Mr Sleman,’ said Mr Huggin, sternly, at this point, ‘I will not be talked to in this manner. My principle is to buy pictures, not to retail them.’

Thus this pair went on for several years; Mr Huggin ‘bleeding’ freely—almost to the death—and Mr Sleman fattening undisturbed upon his innocent purchaser.

IX.

The purple-bloom view of art had never taken an undivided hold of Mr Huggin; its influence had been shared with the lower feelings of the trader. Mr Huggin was just as much a picture-dealer as Mr Eizak Sleman; with this difference, that he trusted to ‘self-education’ and ‘natural abilities’ to teach him his business. There are very few men in the coal and potato line who feel incapable of editing a newspaper; and there are very few editors of newspapers who feel incapable of managing a slate quarry. Mr Huggin had more than his share of this enterprising confidence; and when he began to grow tired of the barren reputation he had established as a person of taste,

he prepared his gigantic collection for the market without the slightest misgiving. The impression made upon him at the sale of Sir Saffron Hill's treasures had never faded from his mind, and Messrs Crystal and Ransom were, of course, the gentlemen who received his instructions. From this moment the hitherto constant Mr Eizak Sleman disappeared, and melted, for ever, into the broad bosom of the Salamans' family.

X.

There was something wrong about the first day's sale. The attendance was tolerably numerous, and many pictures were sold, but the receipts were ridiculously small, considering the expectations of Mr Huggin. Perhaps Mr Huggin's reputation was not so well advertised as the late Sir Saffron Hill's? Perhaps it would have been better if the collection had been sold as belonging to a mock baronet? The auctioneers were suspiciously—almost painfully—silent. Mr Huggin glided busily about the room; and was much hurt to find that those who appeared to be professional picture-dealers abstained from rising beyond a very low bidding. Mr Huggin prided himself upon being a shrewd, experienced man of business, and he thought he knew exactly what to do under the circumstances. He privately retained several sham buyers for the second day's sale, in order to support the market.

The first lot that was brought forward was an enormous piece of Chinese-looking art, that was said to be the masterpiece of the divine Bellini.

'Ten pounds,' began the auctioneer.

'Thirty, forty, ninety, two hund'ed, seven hund'ed,' shouted half-a-dozen shabby men, who leaped up one after the other, like so many Jacks-in-boxes at different parts of the room.

'Ten pounds, I say,' repeated the auctioneer, looking sternly at the sham bidders, and going back to his starting-point.

'Ninety, two hund'ed, six hund'ed, thousan',' exclaimed the same shabby men, leaping up as before.

'Gentlemen,' said the auctioneer, with dignity, 'it's very evident what this means; and I think we'd better close the sale.'

There was much confusion after this, but no serious opposition to the proposal, and in half-an-hour the public had all left the place.

'Mr Crystal—Mr Ransom—sir—gentlemen,' said Mr Huggin, excited and humbled, in the auctioneers' private counting-house, 'there's some mistake about these pictures—there is indeed!'

‘Mr Huggin,’ replied Mr Crystal, in a tone of pity, ‘the mistake is entirely on your side. You have been grossly imposed upon in a way we can understand. Many hundreds of gentlemen have been so deceived before, and many hundreds will doubtless be so deceived again. Good morning.’

The mist was blown away ; the heavy dream was broken ; and the poor picture-collector retired with his mocking treasures, to munch his bitter apple of knowledge in obscurity and silence.

AN APRIL FOOL.



I HAPPENED to be at a well-known coast town in South Wales last April, at the time when the census had to be taken, and knowing the Chief Registrar of the district, I offered to become a volunteer enumerator. I had been so long idling, lounging, and making tours without having any particular object in view, that the chance of any useful occupation presented itself to me as an agreeable change. My friend very kindly gave me a choice of ground to go over, and I selected a small island—called Swamp Island—lying out in the Channel, about twenty miles from the coast, which had figured in the census tables of 1851 as possessing a population of three. As a wilderness it was only then beaten by Little Papa, one of the Shetland Islands, which held only one person—an old woman ; and by Inchcolm, one of the Fife Islands, which sheltered only one man—a farm labourer. It was a pity, perhaps, that these two solitudes with their two inhabitants could not have been joined together in holy matrimony, forming one decent family on one tolerable island.

Very early on the morning appointed for my journey, I started in a large fishing-smack, the owner of which, for a small consideration, undertook to land me at my destination, and call for me again before night. I was full of curiosity as to what people, and how many, I should find on Swamp Island, but my boatman could give me no information on this head. As there was no good fishing within several miles of the scrubby patch of sea-land to which I was bound, they had never taken the trouble even to inquire whether it was inhabited.

I landed with some difficulty, in a not very shallow creek, and

should have been soaked through above my knees if I had not been protected by a thick waterproof dress. The weather had been rather rough during our few hours' voyage from the mainland—much rougher than I expected—and as I am no better sailor than nine-tenths of the human race, I felt a little qualmy. My companions immediately put off again to fish, and I was soon left to make friends with a few seagulls.

Having comforted myself with a little brandy and biscuit that I carried with me, I struggled up through the reeds, stones, and long grass, and prepared to begin my work. I got upon a hillock, and took a survey of the island through a telescope. The prospect was not encouraging. As far as I could see, there was nothing but a dead level of swampy earth and grass, broken here and there with small hillocks, like the one on which I stood. The island was stated by geographical authorities to be about ten miles long, and twelve broad, but the inequalities of the ground would not allow my telescope to range over a third of this space. As there was no house or hut in sight, nor any sign of a human being, I was compelled to walk on in the discharge of my duty. I strode along in the direction of the rising ground in front, now plunging into a hole, now stumbling over grass-covered blocks of stone, and blessing the practical genius who invented roads. One mile of walking on Swamp Island was equal to four miles on the mainland.

In about two hours I reached the distant ridge, and still found no traces of inhabitants. I was rather disappointed at this, though not surprised, for I could see nothing to tempt any one to settle on such a spot. The earth was chalky, and the vegetation scanty, to say nothing of the want of society. If the three inhabitants who had figured in a former census had deserted the place, I felt that I could scarcely blame them.

I altered my course at this point, and followed the line of a shallow valley. I had not proceeded far, when I came to traces of mud, and a little farther on to a narrow channel of water. Keeping along the side of this inland stream, which I soon found to be a long tidal creek running down to the sea, I came suddenly on a large flat-bottomed boat, something between a fishing-punt and a barge, moored close to a bank on which stood a low hut, built chiefly with turf and stones. I lost no time in pushing open the half-closed door of this hut, and was met by a dense cloud of smoke which nearly choked and blinded me. It came from a fire of damp wood. When the fumes had partly blown off, I peeped through the door again, and saw an old man

kneeling on the turf-floor, blowing the embers with his mouth. His dress was ragged; almost theatrical in its tatters, and his long dirty beard dragged through the ashes.

‘Stand out of the draught,’ he said, angrily, without turning round, ‘and don’t thwart me, pampered menial!’

I thought the style and tone of his address somewhat peculiar, and I soon explained who I was, and on what errand I came.

‘Census?’ he said, standing up, and looking at me; ‘why am I hunted about in this way? I come miles beyond the Land’s-end for quiet, solitude, air. I can’t breathe in cities—no man can breathe in cities; I fly to nature, and want to be left alone.’

‘We shall not trouble you again for ten years,’ I returned, amiably; ‘perhaps not then.’

‘Ten years!’ he said, contemptuously, ‘what’s ten years—what’s twenty years—to one who has lived for centuries?’

‘Eh?’ I answered, pricking up my ears at this, ‘lived for centuries?’

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I have just completed my one hundred and seventy-sixth year.’

‘This sounds very remarkable,’ I replied, ‘and it is almost as strange to find you living in such a desert as this.’

‘You may think so,’ he said, shortly, ‘I don’t.’

‘What name will you put down in this paper?’ I asked, producing the official form, ‘and what profession?’

‘Profession?’ he inquired, vacantly.

‘Occupation,’ I replied, ‘calling—in fact. What are you?’

‘Ha, ha!’

‘That’s no answer,’ I said, in a dignified manner.

‘What am I?’ he continued; ‘what am I not? Do you think my history can be crammed into a line, or into a thousand lines? You’ve asked for it, and you shall have it. Sit down, and hear it.’

I squatted on the turf floor in obedience to this request, which sounded like a command, and my wild-man-of-the-woods-looking host soon squatted opposite me.

‘I am prepared,’ he began, ‘for any amount of doubt when I say that I never knew who my parents were; but I despise doubt, and those who feel it. I was found in a wood in a neighbourhood that it is idle to name, because it was destroyed by an earthquake more than a hundred years ago. I was discovered walking on my hands and feet, climbing trees like a squirrel, and feeding on grass and moss. The early habits thus implanted in me have never altogether left me,

and this is why you find me now living contented on what you contemptuously term "a desert." Many ignorant people were frightened at my singular appearance, for my colour, at that time, was nearly black——'

'I beg your pardon,' I said, 'but what do you call your colour now?'

'No matter,' he replied, 'I hate to be interrupted.'

'A huge dog,' he continued, 'was set at me, but I awaited his attack without stirring from the place, and gave him such a blow over the head with a club which I held in my hand, that the animal fell dead, and his master became respectful. After this feat I climbed a tree and took a little repose on a branch, but was allured down by some raw meat (I am still partial to raw meat), a bucket of water, and a rabbit. I stripped off the skin of the rabbit, and devoured the flesh ravenously. I was taken in charge by a shepherd, who washed me, and found that the black colour of my skin was not natural. I was considered fair, and, on the whole, tolerably well formed, although very short; and my fingers and thumbs were uncommonly strong, which was ascribed to my practice of climbing trees. On account of my wildness I was known as the "shepherd's beast," and it cost a deal of trouble to render me a little tame. I was very dexterous in making holes in the walls or roofs—too dexterous, no doubt, for the comfort of my shepherd—and one day I crept through a space not larger than a rat-hole, fled once more to the woods, and became a gipsy.

'I was soon initiated into the arts and mysteries of the wandering tribe I had joined, and was foremost in all exploits for which gipsies are famous. Being wonderfully short for my age, which was considered then to be about twenty or twenty-five years, I was exhibited as a famous dwarf. My height was not more than two feet and a half, and my weight fifty-six pounds. I was remarkably agile, and could spring with ease from the ground to a table or a mantel-shelf. I remember being told by a friend, who died about a century and a half ago, that I was rather of a morose temper, and extremely vain of myself, but this I can hardly believe. I was once brought into a room, to amuse the company, enclosed in an ordinary pie. I was often teased by many of the visitors, and once, I admit, I so far lost my temper as to challenge my enemy. He came to the place of meeting armed only with a squirt, and this so increased my anger that a real duel ensued, and, as I was mounted on a chair to put me on a level with my antagonist, I fired, and shot him dead.

‘After this unfortunate adventure I fled from the town and my gipsy friends, and sought my fortunes in another direction. I disguised myself as a female, and went on board a large merchant vessel as a cook’s attendant. I was looked upon as a mere child, a girl of all work, and so escaped much attention. I discharged my duties to the satisfaction of my employers, and passed a very pleasant though hard-working time until we came to an anchor at a port in the Mediterranean. Here one of the sailors, a second mate, became too idle to mend his own shirts, and he handed them over to me, along with a lot of stockings requiring footing, because I was the only female on board. Of course I knew nothing of needlework, and yet was afraid to confess my ignorance, for fear the deception I had practised upon the captain and owners of the ship should be discovered. I saw no way out of the difficulty except flight; so, throwing the unmended rags down the hold, I watched my opportunity, rowed on shore in a boat, and mixed with the natives of Genoa in my own proper character.

‘I lived for several years very comfortably in a number of southern cities, doing little work, because living was cheap, and the climate made it easy to sustain nature on a very small quantity of food. Whether the warmth of this part of the world acted on my system like the atmosphere of a hothouse upon plants I never clearly understood, but I grew so rapidly in height and strength, during the five or six years of my travelling, that I soon began to excite attention as a giant.

‘I was not one of those common giants, who rely upon creating wonder by their unwieldy size. I possessed many accomplishments, both intellectual and physical. As a posturer I was without a rival, and could exhibit, in the most natural manner, almost every species of deformity and dislocation. I amused myself with the tailors, by sending for them to take my measure, and contriving so as to have an immoderate rising in one of my shoulders. When the clothes were brought home to be tried on, I had shifted this hump to the other shoulder, and the tailors took back the garments, apologizing for their mistake. I played such tricks with the vertebræ of my back, that a celebrated surgeon, before whom I appeared as a patient, was so shocked at the sight he would not even attempt my cure.

‘I was now nearly nine feet high, and I made a triumphal tour from town to town. I had gone through the whole circle of the sciences, could speak and write in ten different languages, was an

accomplished rider, dancer, and singer, and a skilful performer on several musical instruments.'

'Did you ever hear of a person called the "Admirable Crichton?"' I asked, breaking into my host's narrative at this point.

'Crichton, Crichton,' he answered, as if reflecting. 'Was he a celebrated miser?'

'Not at all,' I said; 'he was a half-fabulous wonder of cleverness.'

'Never heard of him in all my life,' returned my host, pettishly, 'and I don't see what the question has to do with my story.'

'I will not weary you,' he continued, 'with a detailed account of my success in disputing with learned doctors, fighting with rampant gladiators, and performing many characters in an Italian play of my own writing. The narrative might possibly annoy you, by exciting envy. It is sufficient for me to tell you that I did all these things before I had reached the age of thirty. I distinguished myself in a much lower sphere by several displays of extraordinary strength, in which I pulled against two horses, lifted three hogsheads of water weighing nearly two thousand pounds, rolled up a very large pewter dish with my fingers, and raised a table six feet long, with half a hundred-weight fastened to it, in my teeth. I tied a kitchen poker round my neck like a cravat, and broke a rope about two inches thick.'

'About this period I began to decrease in height, and to increase very much in breadth. Some of the doctors attributed the change to the fact that I had compressed myself in carrying an enormous weight upon my head during one of my exhibitions. Whatever was the immediate cause, I gradually grew stouter for ten years, until I weighed nearly fifty stone. My size was nearly three yards round the body; my legs measured a yard round the thigh; and a common suit of clothes cost me twenty pounds.'

'Have you ever heard of Daniel Lambert?' I asked, again interrupting my host.

'Of course I have,' he answered; 'he was a running footman.'

The coolness of this reply effectually silenced me, and I allowed the story to proceed without any further interruption.

'My excessive and increasing corpulence,' he continued, 'filled me with alarm, and I at last placed myself under strict rules of diet. This required a vast deal of sustained resolution, for almost from the beginning of my change in size I had been afflicted with a voracious appetite. I thought little of devouring at one meal as much as sixteen pounds of meat and bread, and there were times when my appe-

tite was even more ravenous. My drinking was also in proportion to my eating, although I was never intoxicated. All this had to be changed, and I therefore copied the plan of Louis Cornaro, of whom *you* may have heard. It was a hard struggle, but I persevered. As I thought it prudent not to make a total alteration in my diet suddenly, I confined myself to a pint of ale a day, and used animal food sparingly. This method I soon found to answer to my satisfaction, for I felt easier and lighter, and my spirits became less oppressed. During the next two months I struck off half my drink, and more than half my animal food. I next gave up my malt liquor, and confined myself entirely to water for about a year, at the end of which period I was able to do without any fluid except what I took in the way of medicine. I next avoided cheese, then butter, and at last was able to turn my back upon animal food, and to sustain myself entirely upon pudding made of sea-biscuit. I allowed myself very little sleep, generally going to bed at eight o'clock in the evening, sometimes even earlier, and rising about one o'clock in the morning. My voice, which I had entirely lost for several years, came back to me clear and strong; my flesh became firm, my complexion a good colour; and I reduced my weight at least forty stone.'

'Did you ever weigh yourself, to test the truth of these figures?' I asked.

'Never. Prejudiced by a commonly prevailing superstition, which, of course, I see the folly of now, I never suffered myself to be put in the scales, either during the state of my extreme corpulence, or after my reduction.'

'Why did you subject yourself to such very strict rules of diet?' I inquired; 'stricter even than those which governed your teacher, Cornaro?'

'Because I was ten years older than Cornaro was when he began his regimen, and I therefore thought, on that account, a more severe and abstemious course was necessary. I was greatly influenced by Dr Cheyne's opinion, that Cornaro would probably have lived longer had his regimen been more strict. Dr Cheyne was right, as I have tested by experiment, and I have been right in following the advice of Dr Cheyne. For more than a hundred years I have been fed upon a pudding, the composition of which you may be curious to learn, especially as you show a tendency to become stout, and are evidently not in very sound health. Take three pints of skimmed milk, boil them and pour them on one pound of the best sea-biscuit, broken into pieces: do this over-night, and then leave the ingredients to stand

together until the following morning, when you may add two eggs. This compound, being boiled in a cloth about the space of an hour, will become a pudding of sufficient consistency to be cut with a knife. No matter what may have been the season—what festivities were going on—what temptations there were to a little self-indulgence—I allowed myself only a pound and a half of this pudding at four or five o'clock in the morning, as my breakfast, and the same quantity at noon, as my dinner. What is the result? At the age of a hundred and ninety——'

'I beg your pardon,' I said, 'you told me you were only one hundred and seventy-six.'

'Did I?' he answered; 'well, say one hundred and seventy-six, then—we'll not quarrel about fourteen years—at this age I am able to live cheerfully without company in what, as I before remarked, you contemptuously style a desert. I am active and vigorous, and in full possession of more than my proper faculties. I am able, at times, to pick out colours with my eyes closed, and to read a book with my fingers' ends. Sometimes I can walk in my sleep with even more security and speed than when I am awake; which I look upon as a proof that my system of diet is correct.'

My host's story might probably have continued for several hours longer, as I really had not sufficient determination to stop it, if we had not been interrupted at this point by the appearance of a third person at the door of the hut. The new comer was a man, about forty, and, if dress were any sign of quality, I might have thought that I had been entertained by the servant in the absence of the master. I was not, however, left long in suspense as to the relation in which the two islanders stood to each other, for my ragged host immediately addressed the new comer in a loud, authoritative tone:—

'Pampered menial! Take off that dandy coat, and blow the fire.'

The new comer obeyed this rude command rather slowly and sullenly, muttering something about not being so fond of rags as some people were.

'Silence!' again shouted my ragged host. 'If Crusoe and Friday quarrel in private, let them preserve a certain decency before strangers.'

I fancied preparations might be made to feed me with the sea-biscuit pudding I had heard described, and had not felt any particular wish to taste; so, as my time on the island was drawing to a close, I rose to go. My host insisted on the 'pampered menial' seeing me to the coast, and my proposed guide assured me that no one else was to be found upon the island.

‘Worse luck,’ he said, as we left the hut together, ‘for he does try the best of tempers.’

‘You mean our eccentric friend yonder?’ I remarked, inquiringly, pointing back to the hut.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘If his friends didn’t pay me very well, I should pitch him over, like a shot.’

‘Isn’t there something the matter with his head?’ I asked, trying to put the question very delicately.

‘Sometimes I think there is; sometimes I don’t. He took to this place because he was fond of fishing, though we never catch much worth speaking of. Even what the smacks catch is sent up to London, and we have to get it down again by signals.’

‘Fish?’ I said; ‘I thought he lived upon nothing but pudding.’

‘Oh, he’s been pitching that yarn into you, has he? He eats a precious sight more than I do, and thinks a good deal more about his dinner.’

‘I suppose,’ I said, ‘you have heard the extraordinary story of his life?’

‘Heard it?’ he returned, ‘I should think I have! He goes over it about three times a week, or one hundred and fifty times a year. It all comes of reading of one book—the only book he’s got with him—called ‘Wilson’s Wonderful Characters.’ He muddles them all up together, and then goes and swears he’s been through all the adventures, because his name happens to be Peter Wilson!’

‘That looks like madness,’ I said. ‘Perhaps, however, it’s as reliable as the book,’ I thought.

‘So his friends think who live on the mainland opposite,’ returned my guide, ‘but I think the madness shows itself most in living here. They’ll find that out some day, when I leave them, and they have to advertise for another “companion” to my gentleman.’

When we arrived at the coast, we found my boatmen within hail. Before embarking, I inquired my guide’s name, and, as he answered me, he seemed to have something on his mind.

‘Can I do anything for you on the opposite shore?’ I asked, willing to make myself useful to the lonely islander.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘there’s one thing I want to ask you. Is that census return, as you call it, going to be put into print?’

‘Undoubtedly,’ I replied.

‘What have you got him down as—the party up at the hut?’

‘Peter Wilson: no profession: age, one hundred and seventy-six.’

‘You can let that stand, if you like, but don’t go and call the island a private madhouse, and put me down as a keeper.’

‘How shall I describe you?’ I asked, willing to humour him.

‘Call me a shepherd,’ he said. ‘Because I’ve got some friends on the opposite shore—especially a female friend—and I don’t want to be laughed at.’

I complied with his request in filling up the official form; and he stands in his country’s account-books as Giles Storks: profession, shepherd: age, forty-two.

A MUSCULAR TUTOR.



BLESSED is the man who has got a hobby! He goes to bed happy; he rises in the morning with an agreeable object in view; and his thoughts during the day are wholesomely and entirely occupied.

Happy would Mr Wheezy have been if, during the last five-and-thirty years, he had had leisure to cultivate a hobby; but as he had not, he was thrown upon his own resources, which were hardly strong enough to bear him. He had retired, after a long and successful course of industry, from a wholesale grocer’s business in Budge Row, City, and for the first few months his altered situation afforded him a sensation of pleasure, which became less powerful, however, day by day, as the novelty gradually subsided.

Mrs Wheezy had many estimable qualities, many domestic virtues, many small talents; but the art of conversation was not amongst them. Accomplishments she had none; and though foremost amongst the household gods in Mr Wheezy’s dwelling was a splendid piano in a showy case—as good as money could purchase—it was very seldom opened to the sound of melody, except when Miss Wheezy (aged nine years) thought fit to go through the first fifteen of Czerny’s hundred and one exercises.

Mr Wheezy had taken his wife to all the sights of London. They had been everywhere, and had done everything that rather fat people could do—not, of course, going up St Paul’s, or the Monument—and that source of enjoyment and occupation was closed. Mr Wheezy began to find his mornings hang heavily on his hands; his afternoons were passed in sleep; his evenings were occupied with vacancy, or a game at ‘all-fours:’ he retired to rest early, he rose late, he ate much,

and took little exercise; and he, consequently, increased perceptibly in bulk until he reached the age of forty-eight and the weight of seventeen stone.

Mr Wheezy attended the reading-room of a neighbouring Literary Institution every morning, for the purpose of seeing the newspapers of the day; and here he formed a speaking acquaintance with a superannuated Government clerk, who was not unlike himself in tastes, character, and habits, and from whom he acquired the hobby of the persistent riding of which I am about to lay an account before the reader. This gentleman had passed many years of his retirement in trying the effect upon his body of different medical systems. Not that he was ever really ill; on the contrary, his constitution was remarkably vigorous: but having nothing to do, he had allowed himself to imagine a variety of diseases which might at any time fall suddenly upon him, and his plan was to take a variety of remedies in advance, under the strong belief that he was fortifying his health against the day of trial. Curiosities of diet, small doses of physic, large doses of physic, and no physic at all, eccentric performances with cold water, unusual hours of rising and going to bed, had each in their turn exercised undivided authority over him. At the time when Mr Wheezy first became acquainted with him, he was acting under a self-imposed system of violent gymnastics.

Mr Wheezy was just in a fit humour to become converted to any theory that promised to furnish health, exercise, and amusement combined; and, like nearly all converts, he threw himself into the proposed performance with such remarkable energy, that he soon left his master and his teachings very far indeed behind.

Mr Wheezy looked at his two sons and his daughter, and suddenly discovered how much their physical education had been neglected. Their mental education was certainly nothing to boast of; but as this did not come within the operation of Mr Wheezy's hobby, no notice was taken of it. The boys were fat, but not too fat for well-fed boys; and the girl took after her mother, in having a short, round figure. The girl was at once provided with back-boards, dumb-bells, and swinging clubs; the boys were encouraged to lift and throw heavy weights, to leap, fence, and even play single-stick; and a most elaborate rack, entitled a gymnasium, was erected at the bottom of the garden, upon which Mr Wheezy led the way in teaching his children those violent arm-ricking, blood-to-the-head-sending evolutions, which were to make six-foot men and hearty centenarians of them, and attack and vanquish corpulence and fatty degeneracy in himself.

Mr Wheezy was as constant to his hobby as if it had been a treadmill, and he had been chained to it by necessity, and not by choice. Visitors to Mrs Wheezy saw him out of the back drawing-room, inverted, like an acrobat, in the air, or looking at them from between his legs, in a very red and bloated condition. When the tax-gatherer or any other person called upon business, Mr Wheezy had generally to be arrested by the servant in the midst of his rapid revolutions upon the pole, like a wheel of an engine that is suddenly stopped in full motion by the engineer. Sulkily and fretfully he went into the house, discharged the visitor with as little ceremony as possible, and returned with little delay to his favourite and engrossing recreation.

‘But, notwithstanding all this steady physical activity, the seventeen stone, with symptoms of fatty degeneracy, obstinately refused to be decreased, and he remained at exactly the same weight, according to the index of the best machine, even to half an ounce. It may have been that without these performances Mr Wheezy’s form would have increased in bulk, and that he ought to have congratulated himself upon attaining, by great exertion, a stationary, if not a decreasing weight. But Mr Wheezy did not in the least entertain this view of the case, and he therefore sought another consultation with his friend at the Literary Institution.

‘My dear sir,’ said that restless experimenter, ‘I am sorry to have misled you, but the gymnasium is a great mistake.’

‘Indeed!’ returned Mr Wheezy, rather astonished.

‘It may contribute,’ continued the experimenter, ‘to keep down corpulence—though even that is doubted by the best authorities; but it produces a variety of ills in its place, which are even more injurious to the system.’

‘May I ask,’ said Mr Wheezy, rather anxiously, ‘what some of these ills are which you allude to?’

‘Certainly,’ replied the experimenter, with the air of a well-informed man. ‘I don’t think I need go any further when I have mentioned apoplexy.’

‘But,’ stammered Mr Wheezy, for apoplexy was his bugbear, ‘you don’t mean to say the gymnasium fosters this?’

‘It converts a melancholy chance into a more melancholy certainty,’ returned the retired Government clerk, in a very decided tone. ‘I have sold my gymnastic apparatus to a broker in the neighbourhood.’

‘Is there nothing,’ inquired Mr Wheezy, in a still more anxious

manner, 'that will stop the progress of fatty degeneracy, without inflicting the greater evil of apoplexy? My doctor tells me he can do nothing for me; I must take exercise. What exercise? I ask you, sir, what exercise?'

'There is only one thing,' returned the experimenter, who was waiting to be asked, 'and that is to do as I am doing—go into training.'

'Training?' said Mr Wheezy: 'what is that?'

The retired Government clerk had now arrived at the desired point, and he proceeded to explain to Mr Wheezy how he had been introduced to a man—common enough in appearance, but worth all the doctors in Europe—who undertook to bring any gentleman into a firm, muscular condition, no matter how far gone in corpulence, in the space of six weeks, or two months, for the sum of fifty pounds.'

'He was introduced to me,' said the experimenter, 'by a nephew, who mixes a good deal with sporting men, and persons of that class, you know; and I believe that this trainer has been in his time a prize-fighter, or something of that kind; but I can answer for his treatment, and I will send him to you, if agreeable, to-morrow morning.'

Mr Wheezy was only too glad to accept the offer; and instead of indulging the next morning in violent evolutions upon the gymnasium poles he remained quietly in his dining-room, waiting for the appearance of the promised trainer.

About half-past ten Mr Wheezy's servant announced the expected visitor, who, in polite society, went by the name of Alick Sloggers, but who was better known amongst his own friends by the title of the Eel. The retired Government clerk's description of Mr Sloggers's antecedents was quite correct. He had been a prize-fighter, though not of sufficient mark and importance to fight his way into the usual public-house; and he was consequently compelled to gain his living now by the exercise of his wits. These wits, fortunately for him—though not, perhaps, for the public—were tolerably keen; and by dog-fancying, pigeon-breeding, teaching the use of the gloves, betting occasionally upon horses, giving opinions upon the breed of bull-terriers, and, lastly, training idle, corpulent, dissatisfied gentlemen into something like good-humour with themselves, Alick Sloggers, otherwise the Eel, managed to collect a very fair income in the course of the year. He was a short man, with cropped hair, small twinkling eyes, a low forehead, a large under-jaw, very thick hands, and a very flat nose. He wore very tight corduroy trousers; a very loose coat,

completely studded with small flap-covered pockets; a dark-blue shirt, with an Indian silk pocket-handkerchief slung loosely round his neck; no waistcoat; and a shaggy, dirty, drab-coloured beaver-hat. Under his arm was a small, sleek, pug-nosed spaniel; and when he entered the presence of Mr Wheezy he slipped this dog into a large side-pocket in his coat, made a rude bobbing bow, put his hat upon the carpet by his side, and waited for instructions. He looked modest and timid; but appearances are deceptive.

‘Mr Sloggers,’ began Mr Wheezy, rather hesitatingly, ‘I am given to understand—that—that you have devoted much of your attention to—to the athletic culture of the human frame?’

‘Beg yer pardon?’ replied Mr Sloggers, not seeming quite to understand the question.

‘You profess the art of training?’ asked Mr Wheezy, in explanation.

‘Train any man,’ said the Eel, doggedly; ‘don’t care who he is.’

The spaniel whined inside the coat-pocket at this juncture, and received a gentle tap on the head from Mr Sloggers’s corrective hand, to remind him in whose company he was.

‘I have some idea,’ continued Mr Wheezy, ‘of placing myself under your system; can I do so with perfect safety?’

‘Show me,’ said the Eel, with thorough self-confidence, ‘any hinfant as it’ll ’urt, an’ I’ll forfet twenty pund.’

‘Very well,’ said Mr Wheezy, assured by this unwavering assertion; ‘perhaps you can tell me how it is I make flesh so fast?’

‘’Course I can,’ replied the Eel, ‘with ’arf a heye: your’re not so much hover-fed, as blowed out wi’ wash.’

‘Ah!’ said Mr Wheezy.

‘’Arf o’ that stuff you’ve got on you,’ continued the Eel, advancing to Mr Wheezy, and grasping several pounds of the fatty covering of that gentleman’s ribs, ‘is o’ no more huse nor my little finger. If you hadn’t been a nat’rally stiff-built man, you couldn’t ha’ staggered hunder it.’

‘Just as I thought,’ murmured Mr Wheezy.

‘You’d make a fourteen-stunner look foolish aside o’ you,’ resumed the Eel; ‘and yet your proper weight’s hunder twelve stun.’

‘So I always said,’ replied Mr Wheezy.

‘If you’ll put yourself hunder me,’ said the Eel, ‘I’ll bring yer down agen to risonable weight in a month, or know what’s what.’

Mr Wheezy was perfectly satisfied. He understood that the diet would be strict, and the exercise, at first, rather irksome; but any

such desirable result as a considerable reduction of his body was not to be attained without a struggle.

Mrs Wheezy, who had not, from the first, approved of the gymnasium, was even less favourably inclined to this other process of training. She did not like Mr Alick Sloggers—his voice, his manner, or his appearance; and she particularly instructed the servant to have nothing to say to him, and to see that no plate or small article of value was left lying about. When she saw the preparations being made to fit up the summer-house at the end of the garden as a temporary sitting-room and bed-room for Mr Wheezy and his trainer, she remarked to her intimate friends and relations that all domestic comfort between herself and her husband was from that moment at an end, and that it was a bad day for them all when he turned his back upon Budge Row.

Mr Wheezy's dwelling was a semi-detached villa, in the most respectable and quiet part of Clapham. The enemies of the neighbourhood might accuse it of monotony; but they could not, with justice, say one word against its character. Every house looked like every other house, the people who lived there were seldom out after dusk, and the omnibuses from the City and West-end ceased running about eight o'clock in the evening. The whole place was intensely silent, clean, and modern; but if it could not boast any buildings of historical reputation, it was, on the other hand, perfectly free from rookeries and low characters; and the visits of Mr Alick Sloggers to Saccharine Lodge (Mr Wheezy's dwelling) were not long in exciting the observation of the whole immediate neighbourhood. Mr Wheezy's gymnasium, with the constant and eccentric performances of that gentleman upon the poles and ropes, had caused considerable gossip at many local tea-tables, which gossip was not decreased by the preparations being made by the Eel in the garden and summer-house for his two-months' campaign against corpulence and indigestion.

At the back of Saccharine Lodge was a large square paddock, which was bounded on two sides by the walls of villas, and on the other two sides by main roads. The villas that ran along these roads looked on to this paddock from the front, and the villas on the other two sides looked on to it from behind; and as it was rather more than a mile round the inclosure, there was a large number of people nearly always gazing at it from their windows. Mr Wheezy, acting under the advice of the Eel, who wished to secure a walking-ground as near as possible to the premises, made an agreement with the owner to rent

this paddock for twelve months, and immediately had a doorway cut into it through his garden-wall.

In three days after the first interview with the Eel everything was in readiness, and Mr Wheezy went down to his summer-house and began training. He was not allowed by Mr Sloggers to take more than four hours' sleep at a time, although it was no slight task to arouse him at the end of these periods. He was totally cut off from tea, coffee, and rolls; from soup and fish; from hot suppers; from occasional snacks; and from his old fine crusted port, that was more ancient than the neighbourhood in which he lived. His food was strictly confined to stale bread, small draughts of porter, and the lean part of mutton chops. He was trotted round the paddock by Mr Sloggers at all hours of the day and night; and when he returned to his humble dwelling in a very faint and perspiring condition, he was placed under a load of rugs and blankets that made him feel as if boiling in a copper of hot water. After this he was rubbed down like a horse, weighed, fed, put to bed, aroused, trotted round the paddock, blanketed, and so on, over and over again.

Many attempts were made by Mrs Wheezy to break into the mysteries of the summer-house, and to interfere with the even course of the simple diet by the introduction of prohibited luxuries. She knew it was useless to argue with Mr Wheezy in any way, except by attacking him through the pleasures of the table. At the end of the first week she very artfully prepared with her own hands a magnificent venison pasty, which she conveyed to her husband, accompanied with several bottles of his favourite sauces. This was the greatest trial Mr Alick Sloggers had had to undergo, but he was fully equal to the emergency. He met Mrs Wheezy with a bold front at the door of the summer-house, took the tray from her trembling hands, hurled the pie over the wall into the paddock, and poured the sauces calmly out of the bottles on to a myrtle-bush at the end of the garden. Mr Wheezy started up from his tank of flannel, and Mrs Wheezy looked perfectly paralyzed; while the Eel put himself in an oratorical attitude, and thus addressed his employer: 'Heither,' said he, 'I goes on with this 'ere trainin', hor else I don't. I don't care for yer money; take yer money'—(he had been securely paid in advance)—'but don't go an' hinjure my professhunal prospects for life!'

This appeal had the desired effect with Mr Wheezy, who began to feel lighter, and to breathe much more freely, under Mr Sloggers's stern but beneficial treatment; and he begged his wife, in a firm yet

affectionate manner, not on any account to interfere any more with the strict diet prescribed by the best authorities upon athletic training.

Mr Sloggers's influence over his patron increased from this day. Before another week of the training had expired, Mr Wheezy found himself the purchaser of two pairs of large, puffy boxing-gloves, like railway buffers; and as he did not seem inclined for a set-to with his trainer, Mr Sloggers observed that 'a pair o' mittens wasn't worth a screw o' tobacker huntill the dust was knocked orf 'em,' put the gloves on the two Masters Wheezy, one Saturday afternoon, in the gymnasium, with their father's consent, and then stood at the door of the summer-house, enjoying and directing the battle. This debasing spectacle shocked the neighbours very much, especially two maiden ladies who occupied the villa on the right, and a serious gentleman who resided next door on the left. In a very short time the nose of one young gentleman began to bleed, and he immediately ran crying into the kitchen to have his face washed, where his mother saw him with the two remarkable protuberances upon his hands. This naturally drew down a well-merited burst of indignation upon the inhabitants of the summer-house.

'If their father thinks proper,' said Mrs Wheezy, 'to give himself up to low habits and disreputable company, I'm determined that my children shall not be contaminated; this very night they shall go to their aunt's, out of harm's way.'

This wholesome determination was further strengthened by a few remarks made to her, in the course of the afternoon, by the serious gentleman next door, who further promised to call upon the benighted inhabitants of the summer-house; and the two boys were sent off to their mother's aunt, who lived upon her property at Hampstead.

These little domestic discords, however, scarcely reached the peaceful seclusion of the training bower, where Mr Sloggers's power over the mind and body of his patron increased rapidly day by day. Ignorant as Mr Sloggers was, according to the received standard of education, he knew more of human nature than is taught in schools, and he so managed, by wonderful stories of celebrities in the prize-ring, the pedestrian ground, and the general sporting world, as to create in his patron's rather feeble and unoccupied mind a strong desire to know more of physical education and of physical exploits than was contained in a mere six-weeks' training. Mr Wheezy's imagination was especially excited by the history of the renowned Captain Barclay, the first man who had raised training to the

dignity of a regular science, and who had performed the remarkable feat of walking a thousand successive miles in a thousand successive hours.

‘Did he really do it?’ asked Mr Wheezy.

‘There’s no mistake about that,’ replied the Eel, rather resenting the doubt.

‘Have many other people attempted the task?’ inquired Mr Wheezy.

‘Many?’ exclaimed the Eel, with a smile of derision: ‘underds, sir! hactually underds! But, Gawd bless yer, a man as can go an’ do that right hoff, don’t turn hup once in a underd year.’

‘What are the peculiar qualities required to perform this feat?’ again inquired Mr Wheezy, evidently reflecting much upon the undertaking.

‘Staminer,’ said the Eel, decisively; ‘that’s what’s wanted. Hactivity’s all werry well, but hactivity ain’t hevery thin.’

‘I quite understand that,’ returned Mr Wheezy; murmuring afterwards to himself, ‘a thousand hours;—ah—yes—exactly—about forty two days and nights.’

‘Now,’ said the Eel, very confidentially, ‘I’ll tell you a werry kewrious hidea as cum across me yesterday mornin’. I ses to myself, as I see you a peltin’ across that paddick in the eat o’ the day, That’s the gen’elman to do Captain Barclay’s feat, if hever I set my heyes on ’im.’

‘Nonsense, Sloggers!’ said Mr Wheezy, evidently gratified by the compliment.

‘There’s no mistake about it,’ returned the Eel: ‘if I don’t know my bus’ness, I didn’t ought to be ’ere.’

‘I think I’m firm and muscular, Sloggers,’ said Mr Wheezy, rather proudly, drawing his hands towards his shoulders, and giving himself repeated blows upon the chest.

‘Now, look ’ere,’ said the Eel. ‘I ’ad Flying Jemmy under me for six weeks, afore he ran his twenty mile agen a ’oss; I knows ev’ry man as ever fought, or ran, or walked for the last twenty year, an’ not one on ’em can come hup to you in downright staminer.’

Mr Wheezy glowed with delight at this speech, and his ambition was now thoroughly awakened.

‘Staminer,’ continued the Eel, with characteristic repetition, ‘is what you’ve got; hactivity is what you ain’t. I could run a mile quicker nor you could; but blowed if I could keep hup a peltin’ four-an’-a-’arf mile a-hour as you can, all day and all night.’

Mr Wheezy said little more at that time; but the athletic tarantula had bitten him in his weakest part—his small ambition—and the virus was doing its work.

Mr Sloggers was not a clumsy advocate, who spoiled his cause by insisting upon it at all hours and all seasons; he knew the benefit of patience—watchful patience—and the effect of a judicious silence; and a few weeks more proved the soundness of his judgment.

‘Sloggers,’ said Mr Wheezy, one morning, near the close of the period allowed for the training process, ‘what weight am I now?’

‘Nigher thirteen than fourteen stun,’ replied the Eel.

‘Let me touch thirteen stone,’ returned Mr Wheezy, ‘and I’ll attempt Captain Barclay’s feat at once.’

The thing was done; and just as Mrs Wheezy was congratulating herself upon the close of the summer-house campaign, and pitying the appearance of her husband, who had, as she phrased it, ‘fallen so dreadfully away,’ she saw indications, not to be mistaken, that Mr Wheezy’s domestic exile was not yet at an end.

Mr Wheezy’s tremendous effort began at six o’clock on the morning of the twentieth of November, eighteen hundred and forty-nine. His ground was round the paddock—exactly one mile; his refuge was still his own summer-house; and his attendant was still Mr Alick Sloggers, otherwise the Eel. Mr Wheezy looked healthy in the face, though short and puffy in the body, notwithstanding the beneficial result of a long and judicious training. There are some radical physical defects which no human art can ever thoroughly overcome; and Mr Wheezy’s figure was one of these.

The following paragraph appeared in the leading sporting paper:—

‘ONE THOUSAND MILES IN ONE THOUSAND HOURS.—This extraordinary feat has just been commenced by a gentleman novice, upon his own ground, in the Buckram Road, Clapham. Bets are being made with some confidence upon the spirited amateur, as it is said he is acting under the experienced advice of that knowing hand, the veteran Sloggers.’

The following paragraph appeared in a paper of decidedly anti-sporting and strict Clapham principles:—

‘A WRETCHED MANIAC—for in charity we can call him nothing else—has just thrown the highly respectable neighbourhood of Clapham into a state of unhappy excitement, by a series of violent walking exercises in the front of Mr Hosannah’s chapel. If the strong arm of secular authority is not sufficient to stop this melancholy

exhibition, will no one come forward, and endeavour to awaken the misguided man to a sense of the wicked perversity of his empty and vain-glorious enterprise ?'

The immediate result of the first of these paragraphs was to bring a mass of visitors to Buckram Road, which Clapham had never seen before, and never hoped to see again. Half the Hansom cabs in London seemed engaged to drive to and from Mr Wheezy's paddock, carrying strange gentlemen, who looked like ostlers, dressed in stable garments of the finest broadcloth. Dog-carts, with sleek, fiery horses, came up at all hours of the day and night ; some loaded with passengers before and behind, and others with only one yellow-gloved, satin-scarfed, large breast-pinned individual sitting in front, attended by an active groom in very splendid livery. Besides these distinguished patrons of the sporting world, a motley crowd assembled round the paddock. Never before had so many thick-set young men with tight-fitting caps, corduroy jackets, and pearl buttons made the acquaintance of a Clapham public. The two classes stared at each other as if they were inhabitants of two opposite worlds ; and if Clapham did not understand and appreciate St Giles's and Whitechapel, St Giles's and Whitechapel certainly did not suffer under an unreturned love for Clapham. Women were there, in short dresses, thick boots, dirty shawls, ragged bonnets, and uncombed hair. Long costermongers' barrows were there, loaded with a heap of fruit at one end and a heap of copper money at the other. Respectable boys were there, in the intervals of school : some unknown to their parents, others in direct opposition to the express commands of their schoolmasters. Gentlemen's servants, drivers of prim broughams, and waiters at prim tables, managed to attend the walking-ground for a few hours every day, when they were going on errands, or supposed to be working in their employers' gardens. The policeman on duty in the neighbourhood constantly lingered round the paddock, under pretence of keeping the crowd in order. Strange omnibuses came to the scene of action, loaded inside and out ; and the regular vehicles found a flood of irregular traffic. A quiet public-house in the vicinity lost all sense of propriety under the excitement of the occasion, welcomed the ocean of ready money that poured into its till, and raised a flaunting flag upon the summit of its licensed premises. Street jugglers, tumblers, and Punch-and-Judy men, found their way to a scene of attraction that had been an unfruitful desert to them for many years. In the intervals of Mr Wheezy's appearance upon the pedestrian arena the audience amused themselves with conversation, betting,

little amicable sparring matches, drinking, comic songs, and occasional dog-fights. When Mr Wheezy issued from his garden-gate to walk his two miles, from a quarter before to a quarter past every alternate hour, he was received with encouraging shouts of applause. The extreme publicity of his position seemed to be rather agreeable to him than otherwise; and he walked round with a somewhat jaunty air, swinging a thick stumpy stick carelessly in his hand, and lifting one short, fat leg actively after the other, as if he felt in possession of an inexhaustible fund of muscular agility. When he returned to his athletic bower he was put to bed by the Eel, who locked the door of the summer-house, and kept strict watch over his pedestrian charge. Sometimes Mr Sloggers would trot the two miles by the side of Mr Wheezy, for the sake of exercise, and to keep his legs in practice; at other times he would stand at the door of the garden, to answer questions respecting the condition of his patient, which regulated the course of the betting.

Hour after hour—all day and all night—this kind of life went on in and around the paddock. Although the bulk of the visitors was continually changing, some remained till such a late hour of the night, and others came at such an early hour of the morning, that the watch was scarcely ever broken. The regular hours of the neighbourhood were utterly destroyed; and every householder went to bed and arose with a heavy sense upon his mind of a riotous impropriety which was undermining the happiness and respectability of the once peaceful Clapham. The only one, however, who exhibited any personal show of opposition upon the ground was the serious gentleman—the next-door neighbour—who made his promised call at the summer-house, attended by Mrs Wheezy, with a view of awakening its inhabitants to a sense of their folly. They were received at the door by Mr Alick Sloggers.

‘Now, then,’ said the Eel, very gruffly, ‘what’s the row?’

‘Is Mr Wheezy within?’ inquired the serious gentleman, in a conciliatory tone.

‘Hin!’ replied the Eel; ‘acorse he is. You’d be hin, if you’d bin walkin’ all night!’

‘My friend,’ said the serious gentleman, in his most serious manner, ‘have you fully considered—has Mr Wheezy fully considered—the end of all this labour and energy? Why——’

‘Now,’ said the Eel, interrupting the speaker, ‘I don’t want to say nothin’ disrespec’ful, but I’m here to see as the gent ain’t worried. He’s got ’is work cut hout for the next five or six weeks——’

‘Five or six weeks!’ almost shouted Mrs Wheezy, learning for the first time the full extent of her husband’s voluntary exile. ‘What, over Christmas Day?’

‘Yes, mum,’ said the Eel, ‘hover that; an’ he can’t be interrupted by any one—not heven his own father.’

Mrs Wheezy and the serious gentleman went away; the first to go at once to her aunt at Hampstead, for advice under these trying circumstances; the second, to consult with Mr Hosannah at the chapel. Mr Hosannah’s course was quite clear; he fulminated against body-worship from the pulpit, and had the satisfaction of gratifying a large body of hearers, who were all previously of his way of thinking. Outside the walls, however, amongst that mass of rude material for missionary enterprise assembled round the paddock, his words did not penetrate, and the serious gentleman’s attempt at field-preaching was confessed to be a miserable failure.

Every two hours the determined Mr Wheezy staggered through his two miles, getting more bloated, more sleepy, and more fishy-eyed each time. The faithful, constant Sloggers was ever at his side; and his audience were always standing round the enclosure to cheer him through his task.

Mrs Wheezy’s interview with her aunt—a woman of experience and decision of character—resulted in the bringing down of that lady to Saccharine Lodge. The moment she arrived she went to the summer-house, out of her cab, with a stout umbrella in her hand; and although the vigilant Sloggers was at his post, ready to resist her intention, it would have taken fifty Sloggerses to have kept her away from her nephew.

‘Now, mum!’ said the Eel, trying the same tone and manner which had been successful with the serious gentleman and Mrs Wheezy.

‘Don’t mum me,’ said the decisive aunt, poking him on one side with her umbrella. ‘Where’s my deluded nephew?’

She was in the sacred summer-house, having locked the door securely behind her, before the astonished Eel could recover himself, and was stirring up the drowsy and exhausted Mr Wheezy in his tank of welcome flannel.

‘All right,’ he murmured, half asleep, supposing it was the Eel arousing him for one of his walking-rounds, which was within a minute of being due;—‘all right—Slog—half—minute—I—can—do ——’

‘No, Mr Wheezy,’ said the decisive aunt, ‘it’s not all right, while you’re cutting yourself off, like a transported felon, from your wife

and children, and bringing yourself to the brink of the grave!’

The Eel began to shake the door at this juncture, for the time was up.

‘All right—Slogs,’ said Mr Wheezy, opening his eyes a little more, but not yet recognizing his aunt. ‘I’m good—again.’

The Eel’s knocking at the door became more violent, and Mr Wheezy sat upright rubbing his eyes.

‘Oh yes,’ said the decisive aunt, to Mr Sloggers outside, ‘knock away. A pretty spectacle you are!’ she continued, turning to her rapidly awakening nephew; ‘a nice member of society! a nice father of a family! Oh, if your poor mother was only alive to see you!’

‘Hullo, aunt!’ said Mr Wheezy, looking round, and now as much awake as he had been for the last two days, ‘where’s Sloggers?’

The knocking of the Eel now became still more violent, and his voice was heard, shouting:

‘If this ’ere door ain’t hopen in a hinstant, I’ll smash the whole bilin’.

This remark had the double effect of bringing Mr Wheezy to a tolerable sense of his position, and of arousing that fierce spirit in the aunt which had obtained for her a family notoriety as long as the half-prostrate pedestrian could remember her.

‘If you don’t go away this instant from that door,’ almost shrieked the decisive woman, ‘I’ll throw this kettle of boiling water over you.’

There was the kettle of water steaming on the hob of the temporary stove, as Mr Alick Sloggers very well knew; and the threat stopped his knocking, though not his voice.

‘Go it,’ he said, ‘go it; time’s more than hup; cross the match; I don’t care.’

Mr Wheezy made a show of rising at these remarks; but it was only a show, for in his secret heart his small ambition to distinguish himself in the pedestrian sporting world had completely died away under the rapidly accumulating fatigue, and he was not sorry for some excuse to put an end to the undertaking.

‘Sloggers,’ he said, ‘bear witness; I’m perfectly ready, but I’m coerced.’

‘You ought to be ashamed, Mr Wheezy, to say so,’ exclaimed the decisive aunt. ‘A nice thing for your poor wife’s relations to come up from the country to spend their Christmas, and to find you living in your own summer-house with an adopted burglar or prize-fighter—it does not matter much which—and trotting round a paddock at all hours of the day and night, like a discontented pony!’

The Dutch clock in the summer-house struck at this moment: an hour had passed without the required mile being walked, and the thread of the great match was lost for ever. Mr Wheezy affected to be sulky as he left the summer-house, and entered his dwelling for the first time for many weeks, in the company of his decisive aunt. Mr Alick Sloggers, otherwise the Eel, had disappeared, probably to avoid facing an indignant populace; more probably to avoid the decisive aunt; but most probably because he had got all he expected to get from Mr Wheezy, and was secretly as glad as his employer that the athletic masquerade was at an end.

There was much excitement in the crowd round the house, and in the neighbourhood, when it became known that Mr Wheezy had broken down, and it was some days before the paddock, the roads, and the public-houses were thoroughly cleared of expectant idlers, and the neighbourhood once more resumed externally its silent and respectable character. The quiet of the interiors was not quite so speedily restored; and to escape the consequences of the scandal he had occasioned, Mr Wheezy was induced by the decisive aunt to remove at once with his family to a villa at a distance from the scene of his exploits, where harmless and steady occupation, according to the latest accounts, has been found him in the shape of a collectorship of taxes. His weight does not exceed fifteen stone; and as he walks in his official capacity over a rather wide and not over-populated range of country, he may occasionally feel himself capable of going nobly through his tremendous effort; but he has never yet had the folly or the courage to make another attempt.*

OUR MR DOVE.



MR LILYSEED was a decidedly clever man. He had tried many professions and occupations about the provinces, and had found them all too slow as roads to wealth. His last and present occupation was that of a London linendraper.

Now a London linendraper may be, and often is, a very dull and respectable man, but Mr Lilyseed was far too clever to be so tamely respectable. Go-ahead was his creed, and Push-on was his watchword; and this was the reason why he was largely trusted and respected. His orders were never neglected in Cannon Street or Man-

* This paper was first published in the *National Magazine*.

chester, and his bills were considered as good as bank-notes, after deducting a slight discount for the time during which they were running.

The main secret, however, of Mr Lilyseed's popularity in the markets, was the excellent faith that he had always kept with his creditors. He had always paid his way. If anybody had suffered, his creditors were not the persons.

Mr Lilyseed had, in some respects, been a singularly unfortunate man; a man who seemed doomed to be visited by the fearful calamity of fire. The electric fluid (as it is popularly called) had always spared his stock-in-trade and household goods, but not so the devouring element. The devouring element was exceedingly hard upon poor Mr Lilyseed, or rather it would have been hard upon him, if he had not been excessively clever, prudent, and far-seeing. As it was, the devouring element was left to wreak its unruly vengeance upon a variety of fire-offices in which Mr Lilyseed was fully insured, and especially upon the great office of the Happy-go-Lucky Insurance Company. The Happy-go-Lucky Insurance Company had plenty of money, a jolly board of directors, and an historical name and reputation, and they paid every demand that was made upon them with the least possible delay, and without any murmurs. The smaller offices sometimes showed a disposition to be waspish, but as their losses were reinsured in the Happy-go-Lucky Office, it was not their place to stand out in opposition to their leader.

It was a somewhat peculiar thing, too, when you came to think of it, that Mr Lilyseed should have been so singularly afflicted. He called it 'visited,' when he was in a serious mood; but, call it by any name, and the fact was the same. A gas explosion at Birmingham; a total burn-out at Norwich; another gas explosion at Liverpool; and a fearful conflagration at his shop and dwelling-house in London, were a very remarkable series of accidents, to say the least of them. Mr Lilyseed and his family were always saved—providentially saved—but the destruction of property was always enormous. Mr Lilyseed had, once or twice, appeared with a bruise, a scorch, a sprained joint, or a head of hair singed, as if it had been prepared by a barber; and, on one occasion, he was nearly sacrificed to the fury of the devouring element; but not quite—in fact, very far from quite. The fires always occurred at a season of the year when the old stock was supposed to be getting dusty, the patterns stale, and the new stock had just come in. The Happy-go-Lucky Insurance Company, however, took no notice of this; and after the last accident, they built a new block of

premises for the enterprising but unfortunate linendraper. The lofty stone-fronted shop formed a very different receptacle for merchandise to the dingy, old, smoky-bricked buildings on either side of it.

This last act of liberality on the part of the Happy-go-lucky Office did not seem to please Mr Lilyseed like the cash-payment form of settlement that had been usually adopted. The expenditure of the money was thereby largely taken out of his hands, and he saw the gradual erection of a new castle and trading establishment, which left him with a very slender balance at his banker's. True, he had the usual payment for the usual stock that had been consumed as usual; and the lease of the new premises, by the rebuilding and improvements, was thereby rendered so much more valuable as a security for raising money. This was the immense advantage that Mr Lilyseed derived from his last and fourth calamity by fire; and yet he was not satisfied!

Mr Lilyseed's commercial operations had always been upon an ascending scale; that is to say, when he paid a manufacturer's bill of two hundred pounds, he bought four hundred pounds' worth more goods from the same person; and when, in other instances, he cleared off four hundred pounds sterling of debt, he accompanied it by taking eight hundred pounds sterling of credit. This kept his warehouse well stocked with those materials of trade, which, by a little dexterous, though, perhaps, illegitimate manipulation, became the stepping-stone to available cash, that, in its turn, was useful in consolidating the structure of Mr Lilyseed's credit.

Mr Lilyseed was careful to preserve all the outward and visible signs, the forms, and the decencies, or indecencies, of trade. He advertised; he puffed, or was puffed; he connected himself with a political movement and a social movement; he registered a particular article of clothing with a very ugly, eccentric shape, and a more ugly, eccentric Greek title; he did everything, in fact, that was usual or necessary in his trade and position, except to make the ordinary alarming sacrifices. For some reason, these were never required in Mr Lilyseed's establishment. The stock was always pushed off, or consumed (by fire) without them.

Mr Lilyseed was worthy of a more extended sphere of action. His financial abilities had never been brought into contact with the bill of exchange, or there is nothing that might not have been expected as the result. His business was nothing if not a ready-money business, and it gave no opportunities or excuse for drawing bills for goods that had really been sold, or for imaginary transactions that had never

been entered into. When Mr Lilyseed accepted a bill that was drawn by one of his manufacturers, he always did so with a sigh, as he saw glimpses of a financial paradise stretching before him, into which he was firmly forbidden, for the present, to enter.

A person of Mr Lilyseed's ingenuity and resources was not, of course, to be left without a substitute for the accommodating and accommodation bill of exchange, although the substitute was one of a very clumsy, inferior, and inelastic nature.

Mr Lilyseed had early placed himself in the hands of the auctioneers, and had found them a very useful and moneyed body of gentlemen. As gay young men about town are often found to be in the hands of the Jews, and yet seem to lead a very agreeable life, notwithstanding, so staid old shop-keepers about London, are often in the hands of the auctioneers, and also lead a very agreeable life, notwithstanding.

A far less clever man than Mr Lilyseed might have found an auctioneer prepared and willing to advance two-thirds of the cost-price value of goods intended for sale, when every newspaper is full of advertisements from such convenient business gentlemen. A far less cautious man than Mr Lilyseed might have had no fear in sending a few waggon-loads of silks and ribbons to such a well-backed capitalist, where as much individual secrecy of operation, with as much promptitude of payment, was insured, as if the transaction had been one where stolen property was passing between a thief and a receiver. In this case, although caution and secrecy were observed, there was no pressure of any criminal law and its administration which rendered this absolutely necessary. The parties to the operation, if any notice had been taken of it, were, on the one hand, an established tradesman of name and repute, who was clearing out old goods to make room for new ones; and, on the other hand, an equally established auctioneer, of equal name and repute, who was well supported by a spotless and powerful banking-house, and who was receiving and dealing with these goods as per instructions delivered. It is true that after the sale is concluded, and the advance of two-thirds cost value with interest is deducted, together with certain sale-room charges and commission, there will be no balance worth mentioning to hand over to the seller of the property. This will involve a considerable loss that must fall upon somebody's shoulders, and not, perhaps, upon the shoulders of the tradesman who has secured and disposed of the money paid in advance; but this is no business of any impertinent magistrates, any prying police-officers, or any troublesome policeman.

If, in the fulness of time, and the rottenness of a trading smash, such an habitual indulgence in secret sale-room dissipation is found to lead to something very like a fraudulent bankruptcy, there are the proper tribunals appointed to deal with this difficulty, and the fearful penalty of a three months' suspension of certificate.

This was the ever ready means of converting heavy stock-in-trade into portable and circulating cash, of which Mr Lilyseed had very frequently availed himself. He had not been under the same necessity to preserve an impenetrable secrecy, which weighs upon most traders who drink at the same fountain. The money he had received from these sales had been faithfully applied to his creditors, as far as it would go, and the balances which it left against him were of little importance in the case of so good a customer. The money he had received from the Happy-go-Lucky Fire Insurance Company after the devouring element had feasted upon its prey, was thus left securely in his possession, as a basis for future operations. This was no inconsiderable sum, for the account of losses that he rendered exhibited the utmost amount of property destroyed at the utmost of prime cost valuation. He always, somehow or other, forgot to mention the waggon-loads of goods that had been disposed of at the sale-rooms, and no one ever stepped forward to jog his memory. The Happy-go-Lucky Insurance Company never expressed any doubts, or raised any difficulty about paying Mr Lilyseed's alarming claim, or if they did, there was no one to carry them beyond the closed doors of the board-room. The system they worked upon was supposed to produce ultimate profit out of present losses; and in a trading association which spent an enormous sum in advertising every year, it was, perhaps, wisely thought that the prompt discharge of large claims was the best advertisement to increase an already gigantic business. A favourable feature in Mr Lilyseed's case was the fact that his account-books were never destroyed nor even mutilated. The provincial gas explosions and fires, as well as the metropolitan burn-out, had all occurred at night, and at an hour when the books and papers were all secured in an invulnerable iron cupboard. This may have had its desired effect upon the minds of the insurance managers; in fact, it must have had an influence.

If Mr Lilyseed was dissatisfied with the manner in which the Happy-go-Lucky Company had settled his last claim, it was not long before he had substantial reason to be far more dissatisfied. When his new shop was completed, and stocked more closely with valuable goods than it had ever been before, he had the unexpected mortifica-

tion of having his insurance rejected. The Happy-go-Lucky Company had become prudent at last, and while they made no remark about past calamities, they steadily refused to receive any present or future premiums from Mr Lilyseed. The game was a losing one, regarded from every point of view; and years after the clerks in the office had made up their minds upon this point, the board of directors had become dimly aware of it. Mr Lilyseed was politely advised to try a few other large offices in the same line of business; but he was too clever and complete a tradesman to give himself any such unnecessary trouble. He knew it would be fruitless, and he kept his money. It is strange that from that moment he was never troubled with the devouring element.

A few months passed in what may be barely called a legitimate trade, brought on another attack of Mr Lilyseed's speculative energy. It wanted but a few weeks to the fourth day of a certain January on which most of those manufacturers' bills would have to be paid, that had been drawn for the new stock-in-trade of the clever and complete tradesman. Mr Lilyseed found himself very rapidly getting into a corner. It was not a corner in which he suffered from the scarcity of money, but a corner in which he had plenty of that coveted article, and wished to keep it. The cloven hoof began to be a little—just a little—apparent in Mr Lilyseed's little counting-house. He saw no chance of preying any longer upon the Happy-go-Lucky, or any similar company, and he began to turn his own attention towards his creditors.

Mr Lilyseed, for once, took a very unusual step with him—he consulted his solicitor, Mr Darky. Mr Darky was not a professional gentleman of any very great moral principle, but he was thoroughly grounded in the etiquette and routine of his business.

'My dear sir,' he said to Mr Lilyseed, 'you must not come to me at this stage of your career, and tell me you're in difficulties. I mustn't hear it; I can't hear it; I don't hear it. You are not in difficulties; you are perfectly solvent; but you have a large creditor, a cash creditor, who is pressing you for a considerable sum, and you give him substantial security for his claim.'

'But I have no such cred——,' Mr Lilyseed was observing, when Mr Darky abruptly stopped him. The clever and complete tradesman was only clever and complete in his own peculiar way—the way of making money out of the devouring element. In the office of Mr Darky he was again a child.

'That creditor will press you, if I understand you,' returned Mr

Darky, 'in the course of the afternoon. You had better see me again upon the matter, the first thing in the morning. Good-day.'

Mr Darky bowed Mr Lilyseed out with a profusion of nods, and winks, and signs, until the clever and complete tradesman began to see the course it was intended he should adopt. A very little walking brought him back to his counting-house, and a good deal of reflection made him summon Mr Dove, 'Our Mr Dove,' as he was called, his leading shopman, to his presence.

There were several reasons why Our Mr Dove was sent for. In the first place, he was no relation of Mr Lilyseed; in the next, he was an extremely mild, feeble, and manageable young man; and, in the next place, Mr Lilyseed was much pressed to find a reliable persecuting cash creditor. Mr Dove was sounded in the counting-house, was invited to supper, and was spoken to over some midnight pipes and tobacco, and midnight whiskey-and-water. Mr Lilyseed consumed the tobacco and whiskey; Mr Dove was not in the habit of smoking, and preferred a very weak and sweet mixture of wine-and-water.

'If I can do anything to serve you, sir,' said Our Mr Dove, in a timid and devoted manner, 'you may command me thoroughly. I don't understand these things so well as I ought, because they belong to the counting-house, which is not my department; but I suppose I may rely upon Mr Darky, your solicitor, to set me right?'

'Undoubtedly,' returned Mr Lilyseed, in a satisfied and pompous tone (he was not only Mr Dove's master, but he was old enough to be Mr Dove's father). 'Undoubtedly. Have you got a solicitor?'

'Oh no,' replied Mr Dove, very modestly, 'I never had any occasion for one.'

'I thought not,' said Mr Lilyseed, 'and I have provided accordingly. If you will step in, the first thing in the morning, to a Mr Dusky, a professional gentleman, whose place of business is only four doors from Mr Darky's, at No. 15 in the same row, you can instruct him to sue me for five thousand pounds, debt and interest, and you will find him thoroughly prepared to act upon your instructions.'

The next day Our Mr Dove instructed Mr Dusky, who returned more instruction than he received. A writ was issued in the case of Dove versus Lilyseed. A deed of assignment, a bill of sale, was proposed by Mr Darky, acting for Mr Lilyseed, to stop the action. The action was stopped by Mr Dusky, acting for Mr Dove, in consideration of Mr Lilyseed executing this deed, conveying six thousand five hundred pounds in stock and book debts, and paying five hundred pounds in cash to Mr Dove, within four-and-twenty hours. The

margin of two thousand pounds, excess, was left to cover depreciation. An appointment was made to do this, at Mr Lilyseed's establishment, before half this time had expired. Mr Lilyseed had obtained the five hundred pounds, with great difficulty, from a client of Mr Darky's, a retiring capitalist, who advanced upon a substantial deposit of stock to twice the amount. This capitalist did not wish his name to appear, and the whole business was, therefore, transacted through Mr Darky.

At eleven o'clock one morning, the two solicitors, Mr Dusky and Mr Darky, attended in Mr Lilyseed's sitting-room to patch up the action of Dove versus Lilyseed. The plaintiff and defendant, of course, were both present.

'You are willing,' said Mr Dusky, speaking to his client, Mr Dove, 'to accept the bill of sale for six thousand five hundred pounds in stock-in-trade (according to the inventory attached), and a cash payment of five hundred pounds, as a satisfaction of your claim against Mr Lilyseed?'

'Well,' replied Our Mr Dove, who acted his part to perfection, 'I really know so little of these matters, that I must leave myself entirely in your hands.'

'Mr Darky,' said Mr Dusky, addressing his fellow-solicitor, 'will you instruct your client, Mr Lilyseed, to execute the deed?'

Mr Darky did as he was requested, and the bill of sale, in favour of Mr Dove, after a little whispering, a little mumbling, a little pointing, a sound of quill pens scratching upon parchment, and much placing of forefingers upon small red wafers, was duly signed, sealed, and delivered.

A promissory note for five thousand pounds, payable on demand, and bearing Mr Lilyseed's signature in favour of Mr Dove, was handed over to the latter gentleman, that he might sign a memorandum and receipt on its back, referring to the deed and the sum of five hundred pounds which was at that moment to be paid.

'Where do I put my name?' asked the mild and feeble Mr Dove, as he took a very copious dip of ink.

'Immediately under the memorandum,' exclaimed the two solicitors, almost simultaneously.

'Here?' again asked Mr Dove, putting his tongue out of the side of his mouth, like a school-boy over a writing lesson.

'No, there,' observed the solicitors, pettishly, almost guiding his hand to the place, and looking as if they pitied his clumsiness.

'Had I better sign it in full?' asked Mr Dove.

‘As you’re called in the deed,’ they said, pushing that document towards him. ‘John Henry Dove. The matter’s very simple.’

‘I think I ought to count the money—the five hundred pounds?’ said Mr Dove, still hesitating.

‘It’s all right, and in my possession,’ returned Mr Dusky, peremptorily.

‘I ought to count it,’ persisted Mr Dove; ‘we always do so down in the shop.’

The two solicitors looked at Mr Lilyseed.

‘Let him count it,’ said Mr Lilyseed; ‘it’s only five notes of a hundred each.’

The money was handed over to Our Mr Dove, who seemed to be getting very nervous. He counted it tremulously, and then signed the back of the promissory note in a hurried style of handwriting. After he had done this, he crumpled up the bank-notes and the promissory note, and put them in his trousers pocket, while he rolled up the bill of sale, and grasped it like a stick.

‘What are you doing?’ shouted Mr Lilyseed and the two solicitors.

‘I don’t know, I’m sure,’ returned Mr Dove, exhibiting a tendency to collapse; ‘I hope I haven’t got into trouble. I ought to have consulted my mother.’

‘Don’t be a fool,’ said Mr Lilyseed, authoritatively; ‘give the deed, the money, and the promissory note to Mr Dusky, and go down to business.’

‘Oh, I can’t do that, sir, to-day; indeed I can’t,’ replied Our Mr Dove, excitedly. ‘I feel quite ill. I must take a turn round the houses, or I won’t answer for the consequences.’

Mr Dove was evidently very much worked upon by the occurrence of the morning, and every attempt to deal with him rationally, either on the part of Mr Lilyseed or the two solicitors, was utterly hopeless. He was left, at last, in the hands of his employer, simply because no other practicable course presented itself. He persisted in retaining the money and papers; and, what was his in theory, became his in practice.

During the few weeks left to Mr Lilyseed to prepare the decks for his intended insolvency, the relations of master and servant between him and his head shopman were not disturbed. Mr Dove attended to his duties the same as usual, while Mr Lilyseed, as a measure of security, instructed and paid another young man in the establishment to watch him closely, for fear he should dissipate or run away with the five hundred pounds. Mr Dove, to his credit be it said, showed

not the slightest disposition to behave in such an ungrateful manner. He was soft and timid, but he was not dishonest.

The fourth of that particular January arrived at last, and melted very quickly into the fifth. Every bill that bore Mr Lilyseed's name was sent back unpaid from his banker's, for the very sufficient reason that there was no money lodged to discharge them with. Towards evening a number of London creditors arrived at Mr Lilyseed's establishment with consternation in their faces. The next day and the next brought up the provincial and principal creditors, who were equally alarmed at the prospect of heavy bad debts.

They had always been remarkably placid and ready to renew their confidence in Mr Lilyseed when it was the Happy-go-Lucky Insurance Office that was made to suffer. Any suspicions they may have had about sharp dealing on the part of their customer never seemed to shake their faith, for were they not always paid with tolerable regularity, and did not the destructive ravages of the devouring element always produce a fresh demand for merchandise? Now it had come to their turn to lose a stake, they did not seem to relish it.

Mr Lilyseed was not to be seen—he was too unwell to meet his trading connections—and Mr Dove was put forward to answer all necessary questions. Mr Lilyseed's affairs were in the hands of his solicitor, Mr Darky, and Messrs Nought and Carryone, the distinguished accountants, had received instructions to prepare a balance-sheet.

This never-varying answer, while it damped the spirits, served to satisfy the inquiries of the larger creditors, but not of the small ones, especially of one of the small ones. Small creditors are always inclined to shy in harness, and so was this one. The withdrawal of Mr Lilyseed was an act of bankruptcy, according to law, and this particular small creditor availed himself of the Act of Parliament. Without pausing to consider whether he was not playing into the hands of his debtor by forcing him before the humane and lenient tribunal of Bankruptcy, and, much to the disgust of the large creditors, he obtained sufficient co-operation amongst claimants of his own class to carry the point on which he had determined. Before a week had passed, the following notice appeared in the Gazette:—

‘LILYSEED, ABRAHAM, Downy Road, linendraper, January 19th, at half-past twelve, and March 6th, at eleven, at the Bankruptcy Court; solicitor, Mr Darky, Burglarsbury; official assignee, Mr Loteus, Sackinghall Street.’

The balance-sheet that Messrs Nought and Carryone prepared was

a masterpiece of figurative art. The materials, it is true, had been supplied by Mr Lilyseed, or rather Mr Lilyseed's well-preserved books; but what skill they had shown in grouping these materials! The liberal fee that was paid to them over and above the court allowance, was money well laid out to produce a desired result.

Everything was fully accounted for. Mr Lilyseed had been more unfortunate than anybody supposed. In addition to what he had suffered from the devouring element, he had been largely robbed for years by dishonest servants, without being able to make out a case for prosecution; he had been forged upon, to a large extent, by a heartless nephew, who had fled to the Isle of Thanet, where he was lost in a tornado; and he had had to pay a mass of debts contracted without his knowledge by the extravagant woman whom it was his misfortune to call his wife. His family had suffered much from sickness and feebleness of constitution, and he had often had to pay five hundred pounds a year for change of air and medical expenses. A number of bad debts had been forced upon him by the influence of people amongst whom, and by whom, he lived; and he had lost four hundred and fifty pounds at one blow, through accepting an accommodation bill for a man who had saved him from a watery grave when he was quite a boy. The five thousand pounds he had borrowed to extend his business from Mr Dove (a gentleman who acted as his head manager, but who was connected with some distinguished Irish capitalists) had thus been eaten away with other property. At the hour when he thought he was, and certainly ought to have been, a substantial tradesman, he awoke to find himself a bankrupt and a beggar. His solicitor also wished to mention (though, of course, it would have no influence with the court) that the unfortunate bankrupt was subject to fits, brought on, no doubt, by the shock of so many fires.

The commissioner, after a little confidential communication with the official assignee, declined to pay much attention to the feeble opposition of certain creditors. He found that all the expenses of the court were secured by the property which the bankrupt had given up (according to the official assignee's report), and that there was a prospect of an early dividend of at least a shilling in the pound. He was obliged to rebuke the bankrupt for accepting an accommodation bill, and also for giving a bill of sale to Mr Dove so short a period before his bankruptcy; but, having done this in a severe and fatherly manner, he thought the justice of the case was satisfied by granting Mr Lilyseed an immediate third-class certificate.

Mr Lilyseed returned to his establishment, hopeful and triumphant,

with this new license to trade in his pocket, and the faithful Mr Dove was there to receive him. He looked round upon his six thousand five hundred pounds' worth of stock, that had been so cleverly secured from his creditors, and he looked forward to the five hundred pounds and more, in cash, and in Mr Dove's tenacious keeping.

'We must have the place painted up,' said Mr Lilyseed, addressing Mr Dove, and at once assuming the position of a master; 'and I don't like that slovenly arrangement of stock in the windows.'

'While I congratulate you upon your success before the court, sir,' returned Mr Dove, firmly, 'I am afraid that our connection must cease from this moment.'

'What!' exclaimed the clever and complete tradesman, 'you don't mean to say you want to leave me? I was thinking of a junior partnership for you.'

'I'm much obliged to you, sir, I'm sure,' said Mr Dove, 'but I must decline to accept it.'

'Well,' returned Mr Lilyseed, resignedly, 'you'll credit me with having made the offer. Have you got those bank-notes and documents by you?'

'I have the documents,' replied Mr Dove, calmly, 'but I have disposed of the money.'

'Eh—what?' exclaimed Mr Lilyseed, in astonishment.

'I've bought back the lease of these premises, which you had mortgaged up to the neck with Mr Darky's invisible capitalist client, and I've taken the liberty of putting my own name over the door-way.'

Mr Lilyseed was not a fool, and he saw his position. Mr Dove was not a fool, but a wolf in sheep's clothing. The first gentleman found himself completely turned into the street, for the second gentleman was determined to use all the legal power which the bill of sale gave him.

'I am not wholly unprovided with means,' said Mr Lilyseed, accepting his defeat with great self-command, 'if you are disposed to treat for a partnership.'

'I think,' said Mr Dove, 'we are better apart. You are worthy of something far better than I am prepared to offer.'

And so they separated, like prudent traders, each one adopting the course he thought best suited to his worldly welfare. Mr Lilyseed was heard of, some years after, as a gigantic contractor; but whether Our Mr Dove was the same Mr Dove who, about the same time, was heard of as laying the first stone of a gigantic tabernacle, I am not positively prepared to answer.

AN ABSURD STORY.



THINK I may lay it down as a rule, that when a man lives with his mother for forty years—very comfortably, perhaps, but still in perfect subjection to a lady of superior strength of will and knowledge of the world—all trouble of thinking and shifting for himself being taken off his shoulders, all his wants and wishes gratified so long as he keeps within the maternal ken, and desires nothing that the maternal judgment thinks unreasonable or improper, he is not likely to be an individual of any very great force of character, or one whose natural and acquired powers are calculated to conduct him unaided through any sudden difficulty.

Such an individual was Mr Joseph Bowpot, the hero of my story. His father had died when he was about fifteen, leaving a tolerably good fortune, and a very good representative in the person of his son. Mr Bowpot, sen., was a husband who was entirely governed by his wife; Mr Joseph Bowpot was a son who was entirely governed by his mother. The subject was changed, but the ruler was the same.

Mr Joseph Bowpot had all the appearance of a spoiled child of forty; he was short, stout, dreamy in look, feeble in speech, unintellectual in expression, with a small development of brain, and a large development of cheeks. His dress was something between the school-boy and the ungainly quaker; it was chosen by his mother.

However, notwithstanding the peculiar appearance of Mr Joseph Bowpot, and his perfect faith in and reliance upon his mother, he had a human heart beating in his bosom—a heart that was as susceptible to the tender passion as any other heart—perhaps more susceptible than many. Mr Joseph Bowpot was in love and engaged. The young lady (who, I need not say, was approved of by his mother, otherwise he would not have dared to think of her for a single moment) was a family connection, a second cousin, or something of that kind, who resided at Little Mildhampton, Salthamptonshire; and both Joseph and his mother were invited to spend the Christmas holidays at that very charming place, and with very charming company.

They were to go down by rail on the morning of Christmas Eve, and very busy preparations in the Bowpot mansion were being made

for their departure. These preparations were left entirely to Mrs Bowpot: Joseph was left undisturbed to his reflections.

Mr Joseph Bowpot was very glad that they had been invited, as it gave him a chance of spending a month with his Amelia—a month of happiness, but not, he thought, of undisturbed happiness; for he was conscious of his many social deficiencies. He would, in all probability, be asked to ride and shoot, and he had never fired a gun or touched a horse in his life. Most assuredly he would be asked to sing, and he knew no songs; asked to dance, and he had not danced for twenty-five years, since he was at school; but what he feared worse than all was the certainty, as his uncle was not alive, of being asked to carve, and take the head of the table. Of course, he never carved at home; and of all the defects in his education this was the greatest.

Mr Joseph Bowpot, though not a gentleman of brilliant ability, was not totally deficient in common sense, and since his engagement to his cousin, a few weak germs of self-reliance had developed themselves. He had positively acted once or twice without consulting his mother; and he now, after much reflection, acted so again, by purchasing, unknown to her, a 'Comic Warbler,' a 'Ball-room Guide,' and Miss Acton's 'Cookery-book,' containing the whole art of carving. The 'Comic Warbler' embraced the usual assortment of songs—some with bits of spoken composition stuck in between the verses; some with very bad spelling and transposed V's and W's, which were considered to be extremely funny; and others with choruses of inordinate length, in which 'tooral-looral' was rather prominent. Joseph, after much deliberation, fixed upon the 'Cork Leg,' thinking it, no doubt, a novelty, and fancying that it suited his voice; and for many days the upper garret of the Bowpot mansion was made musical with its familiar chorus. This was the lightest task of the three; for mastering the mysteries of the 'Ball-room Guide'—in which the different figures of the quadrilles were set forth almost as mysteriously as the stitches in a crotchet-book—reminded him very forcibly of those days of Euclid, that he thought had gone never to return again. As to the art of carving in Miss Acton's book, that was, indeed, a collection of inscrutable problems. Those were maddening diagrams of the hare, the rabbit, the duck, the pigeon, the fowl, the leg of mutton, the sirloin of beef, and the roast goose, all mapped out with lines and figures, like the plan of an estate belonging to a freehold land society, and with directions underneath as to where the fork was to be placed, and as to the course it was proper for the dissecting-knife to take.

Mr Joseph Bowpot devoted himself assiduously to his studies, but his progress was not very rapid; and by the time the morning of their departure—the morning of Christmas Eve—came round, he had very imperfectly committed to memory the words and tune of the ‘Cork Leg,’ the figures of ‘Payne’s First Set,’ and some few diagrams in the art of carving—section, poultry; hopelessly mixing together the fowl, the duck, and the roast goose.

The time arrived to start; everything was in readiness under Mrs Bowpot’s guidance; the cab was at the door; the presents were put inside; the shawls and rugs were placed upon the seats; the bags and boxes were piled upon the roof; and Mrs Bowpot and Joseph took their places, the latter attired in a rough travelling-suit, with wrappers and comforters, looking not unlike a member of Captain Parry’s expedition to the North Pole. In about half an hour they arrived at the railway station, when Mrs Bowpot, of course, fought out the battle of fares with the cabman, took the tickets for Little Mildhampton, saw the luggage labelled and placed in the van amidst all the din and bustle of a terminus the day before Christmas Day, and, finally, selected the carriage in which they were to travel. The bell rang, they took their places, the last basket of fish was tossed in, the doors were slammed to and locked, and with a grind, a screech, and a whistle, they were fairly on the road for Little Mildhampton.

On they went smoothly enough, stopping at very few stations; and after the first twenty miles, Mrs Bowpot, who, like her son, was of a full habit of body, and who was fatigued with the exertion of preparing for their departure, fell fast asleep in the comfortable compartment of their first-class carriage. Joseph’s mind was too much occupied in revolving the comic song, the quadrille, and the carving, for him to think of sleep.

Joseph was always very regular with his meals—in fact, he was rather addicted to the pleasures of the table; and therefore, when the train arrived at the Swindleham station, about one o’clock in the day, and the guard announced that ‘ten minutes were allowed for refreshment,’ Joseph felt very much inclined to see what refreshment was to be had. Mrs Bowpot still slept, and Joseph did not wake her, but stepping quietly over her rug-protected feet, he passed on to the platform, and through two sets of large swinging doors into the refreshment-room. Old as Mr Joseph Bowpot was, this was his first railway journey of any length, and he was rather bewildered by the large room, with its Turkey carpets, its mirrors and couches, its clatter of coffee-cups, and its semi-circular counter, round which were

a crowd of eager devourers, waited upon by a number of young ladies. After some little time he caught a waiter's eye; the waiter said 'Soup?' and Joseph said, 'Yes;' and he found himself sitting at a round table, with a basin of thick, brown, solid liquor, and the train standing before him outside the window. The soup being hot, it took Joseph some time to finish it; and when he had done, and had called the waiter to pay him, he noticed that the room was very quiet, the devourers had gone, and the young ladies had disappeared; nevertheless, the train was in the same position. He passed on to the platform, and there noticed a great stillness, very unlike what he expected to find on the eve of the starting of an important train. He looked into the carriages one after another to discover his mother, and, to his consternation, found them all empty.

'What train be ye lookin' fur, sur?' inquired an intelligent porter.

'Little Mildhampton,' returned Joseph, rather nervously.

'No train till to-morrow mornin' at eight, sur.'

'Well, but,' exclaimed poor Joseph, in a state of nervous alarm, 'I've just left it—there's my luggage, and my mother, and——'

'Ah,' rejoined the intelligent porter, 'thee'st cum wrang side; this be's Zummerset, that there's Salthamptonsheer.'

It was too true. The unfortunate Bowpot had passed through the refreshment-room to the wrong side, and had fixed his unsophisticated gaze upon a train on another line of rails, that was destined for a part of the country far removed from that to which he wanted to go. His unconscious sleeping mother was separated from her son—like Evangeline from her lover—for the first time during a long and arduous career of forty years, to wake in an agony of astonishment and terror, in the middle of a tunnel or a deep cutting.

Mr Joseph Bowpot — nervous, sensitive, and inexperienced — thrown suddenly upon his own resources, was of course in a very helpless state, and ready to be governed by any advice that was offered him. Little Mildhampton being a small place, it was too true that there would be no other train thither that day; and on the intelligent porter suggesting that Joseph should take a seat in the railway 'bus, and go down to the hotel at Swindleham, he at once consented, and in a few minutes found himself bumping along the country lanes towards the town, in a very light, curious vehicle, licensed to carry eight inside, but built only to carry four.

Swindleham is a place that has sprung into importance within the last few years. It was one of the earliest towns to throw off the spirit of the stage-coach, and to assume an aspect of progress and activity.

It built a new market-hall, a concert-room, and two chapels; and the principal inn in the town, which stood in the market-place, turned its large rambling coach-yard into the assembly and billiard-rooms, and, with a new front, abolished the old-fashioned title of 'inn,' and dubbed itself the 'Royal George Hotel.'

It was to this magnificent structure that Mr Joseph Bowpot was bumped up the High-street, in a very uncomfortable frame of mind, compounded of reproach for his adventurous stupidity in losing his train—regret that Amelia, by living in the country, had been the innocent cause of all this trouble—doubt as to the propriety of his present course of action—and very great fear as to how he should conduct himself at the hotel until the morning. In the midst of his reflections the bounding 'bus pulled up sharply at the door-step of the 'Royal George Hotel;' and to add to Joseph's discomfiture, he heard the ringing of many bells, when there immediately appeared to welcome the distinguished arrival a very stiff, clean, gentlemanly waiter—the incarnate representative of the new order of things at the 'hotel'—a chambermaid, and a 'boots.' Joseph got out far from briskly, and his nervousness was somewhat increased when the 'boots' asked him if his luggage was to go up at once to a room. 'If he had had the boldness then to state his real position, he would have avoided much trouble and suspicion; but he allowed the opportunity to slip, and was bowed into the coffee-room with impressive silence. He sent out a shilling to pay the 'busman, and he had scarcely got his outer comforter off, when it was indignantly returned by that deeply-wronged personage, as being bad, or, as he termed it, a 'duffer.' Joseph looked hard at it, and so did the stiff waiter, and, what is more, the stiff waiter looked hard at Joseph. Joseph threw it down upon the table, and although it made a sound like a lump of putty, he thought it could not be bad; but the 'boots,' who was waiting at the door to take another coin in exchange, put it between his teeth and bit it into two pieces, which settled the point as to its value.

When Joseph surveyed his appearance in the coffee-room mirrors—the first chance he had ever had in his lifetime of getting a fair view of himself—whatever his faith in the general ability of his mother might have been, I think his belief was a little shaken in her taste about masculine dress. The material of his body-garments was coarse and unsightly—being one uniform colour, neither red, brown, nor yellow, but a mixture of the three; this was called a 'travelling suit,' and, with a long overcoat that reached to his heels, was cut in a style that was considered smart when his late respected father was a youth

about town. The stiff, gentlemanly waiter seemed paralyzed as he gazed upon him; but he made no remarks, and attended with dignity and silence to the duties of his office. Mr Joseph Bowpot, it is unnecessary to say, soon felt in awe of that calm, cool, stiff, silent waiter.

‘Have you any orders, sir, for dinner?’ the stiff waiter blandly inquired.

Joseph, as I have said before, was always ready for dinner; it was his great meal; he watched for it, and he reserved himself for it. His love of eating would make him even adventurous for a time, as we saw at the railway station; and when he heard from the stiff waiter that a splendid roast goose was preparing, he threw off, for a moment, his nervousness and timidity, and boldly ordered it in.

When this order had gone forth, the vision of his ignorance of carving arose before him, and he rushed to the pocket of his overcoat for the friendly volume of Acton, which he had providentially placed there along with the ‘Ball-room Guide’ and the ‘Comic Warbler.’ Instead of sitting before the fire, poring over the ‘Times’ of the day before, and the county paper, he turned to the familiar page (No. 48—article, Roast Goose, in the ‘Art of Carving’), and read up again for the forthcoming struggle.

While he was ruminating over the instructions, ‘Take your fork firmly in your left hand, and plant it securely in the figure 4,’ &c., looking at the diagram, and turning it about to ascertain at what part of the real bird the ‘figure 4’ was likely to be, muttering all the while complaints of the unartistic character and want of clearness in the drawings, the stiff waiter had silently laid the cloth on a table between the two bow-windows commanding a view of the market-place, and he now formally announced that dinner was ready.

Mr Joseph Bowpot took his seat very slowly at the table, while the stiff waiter removed the cover from the smoking goose. Joseph made a great display in sharpening his knife, turning up the cuffs of his coat, afterwards his wristbands, then sharpening his knife again, trying it with his thumb, evidently waiting for the stiff waiter to leave the room.

It was half-past three o’clock, and being a wintry afternoon, it was getting dusk.

‘Would you like the gas lighted, sir?’ inquired the stiff waiter.

‘Not at all—not at all,’ returned Joseph, hurriedly. ‘I—I don’t think you need wait.’

The stiff waiter took the hint, but he regarded Joseph with a peculiar expression—made up of curiosity, contempt, and suspicion.

Joseph looked carefully round the room, and finding that he was really alone, he drew the 'Art of Carving' from his pocket, and opening it at page 48, he set it before him against the cruet-stand, reading it across the goose like a piece of music.

'Now,' said Joseph, "'Take your fork firmly in your left hand ;'" so (grasping his fork tightly). "Plant it securely in the figure 4." That's about the figure 4, I think (feeling for the spot with his fingers). Very well ; now to "plant the fork securely" (trying to stick the fork in). Eh ! What ? Why, there's a confounded bone ! Try a little on one side (shifts the fork). A bone there also. Why, hang it, it's all bone ! Stay, perhaps I've got the wrong side. Confound these artists, I wish they'd draw better. It's no more like a goose than I am ! Suppose we turn over gently ; wo ! (Turns the goose over tenderly.) There goes the gravy all over the table and my trousers ! (Sops it up with his pocket-handkerchief, looking round once or twice anxiously at the door.) Now then, once more ; let's see ; where were we ? Oh, on No. 4.'

At this moment the stiff waiter appeared at the door. 'I beg your pardon, sir,' he asked ; 'did you ring ?'

'No, thankee, no,' said Joseph, confusedly ; 'I am getting on nicely.'

The stiff waiter retired.

'I wish that person would not be so officious,' exclaimed Joseph, rather pettishly ; 'he's quite put me out. Dear, dear,' he continued, piteously, 'how cold the bird's getting. "Plant your fork firmly in 4." (Sticks the fork in.) That's all right. What's next ? "Draw your knife across from the point marked 6, through the figures 8 and 10, until you arrive at 12." Halloo ! That's rather complicated ! (Reads slowly, following the directions by corresponding actions with the knife.) "Draw your knife across"—So—this confounded knife won't cut—"through the figures 8 and 10, until you arrive at 12." That's about here. (Stops the motion of his knife.) "You then, by a dexterous twist of the wrist, separate the leg from the body." (Pausing.) How dexterous twist ? (Perplexed.) Somehow like this, I suppose ? Good gracious !' He braced himself up for a great effort, but, unfortunately, instead of being successful, he twisted the goose off the table on to the floor between his feet. For some reason, the stiff waiter again made his appearance.

'Ring, sir ?' he inquired, more laconically than usual.

Joseph, in his trepidation, seized the dish-cover, and clapped it on the empty dish, holding it down with his hand, while he turned

round to the pertinacious, stiff waiter, and with something of indignation in his tone replied:—

‘I did not ring; I tell you I did *not* ring.’

‘Hem!’ was the answer of the stiff waiter, as he again retired.

Joseph gradually recovered himself, took off the cover, and lifting the goose up tenderly with both hands from the floor, he placed it again upon the dish, and took a couple of glasses of sherry to fortify himself for a final effort.

‘Oh, that extremely officious person!’ he muttered to himself; ‘he has thrown me into a profuse perspiration. Dear me! the bird’s as cold as a stone.’

He took a couple more glasses of wine.

‘I’ve not,’ he continued, ‘tasted substantial food for eight hours, and I feel the pangs of hunger. Why should I hesitate? No one observes me. I will.’

He looked round, and finding himself unobserved, he tore off a leg with his hand, and hacked several small pieces off the surface, eating ravenously all the time. Cold as the bird was he ate, or rather devoured, a fair quantity; and by the time his appetite was satisfied, the temporary courage inspired by his half-pint of sherry was exhausted along with the wine, and he relapsed into his original state of nervous excitement. Suddenly his eyes became fixed upon the dish.

‘Good gracious!’ he almost shrieked; ‘what a horrid spectacle! The goose don’t look as if it had been carved; it looks as if it had been worried by a bull-terrier!’

After reflecting for some moments, he continued:—

‘It must never leave the room in that state. I’d rather burn it first. That wouldn’t do either, because of the smell; I should have an engine here in five minutes. Good—a thought strikes me. I’ll give it away to some one in the street, and perform an act of charity at this festive season. It’s a pity to waste it; it shows the remains of a fine bird, even now.’

Acting upon his resolve, Joseph went to the window and looked out. It was now quite dusk; the market-place was quiet; but a common-looking man, half tramp, half stable-lounger, who appeared as if he had not dined for some days, was walking up and down.

Joseph made several ineffectual attempts to catch his eye by nodding and beckoning.

‘Now he sees me,’ he said. ‘I must break the offer to him gradually, or he may be alarmed, and raise the neighbourhood; say—

ing which, poor distracted Joseph sank despondingly into a chair by the window.

The individual—whom, for want of knowing his real name, I will call Smoucher—arrived at the window with wonderful alacrity, and looking through into the half-darkened room, touched his cap.

‘Beg your pardon, sur,’ he said; ‘did you call me?’

‘I did,’ replied Joseph, almost impressively.

‘Did yer honour want yer samples taken round the town?’

‘My what?’

‘Yer samples,’ returned Smoucher, who evidently took Joseph for a commercial traveller bent upon business after dinner.

‘No,’ replied Joseph, without understanding clearly what he meant; ‘that was not my object in calling you; I wished to inquire whether you had dined.’

‘Dined, sur!’ returned Smoucher, in an incredulous tone; ‘yer poking fun at me. I never dines.’

‘Never dine!’ exclaimed Joseph, in amazement; ‘can’t you carve?’

‘Can’t I carve? Rather!—if I only gets suffin to carve; but mindin’ gents’ ’orses, and runnin’ arrands, don’t bring in anything werry strikin’ for dinner worth speakin’ on.’

‘Hum!’ thought poor Joseph, ‘*he* can carve! Half-starved tramp as he is, yet is he superior to me, with all my creature comforts. But, good gracious! that officious waiter may come into the room—I must bring this business to a close.’ Addressing himself to Smoucher, he said:—‘Would you like a portion of roast goose?’ adding faintly, ‘I’ve hardly touched it.’

‘A what, sur!’ asked Smoucher, in astonishment.

‘A roast goose.’

‘I should indeed, sur,’ replied Smoucher, overcome, ‘and thankee kindly; I’m wery much obligated, I’m sure; an’ if there’s anything—’

‘No thanks,’ interposed Joseph, decisively; ‘got anything to put it in?’

‘Well, sur,’ said Smoucher, with some hesitation, ‘if you wouldn’t mind my hankercher—’

‘No.’

Joseph took the handkerchief tenderly between his finger and thumb, as it was very old, and rather dirty. His excitement increased as he thought he heard the footsteps of the officious waiter in the passage; he hurried to the table, and hastily turned the contents of the dish—namely, the goose and a large gravy-spoon—into the handkerchief; glancing nervously all the while at the door, and

scarce knowing what he was about, in the dusk and in his excessive trepidation.

Smoucher's feelings, during this brief interval, had evidently undergone a revulsion. He leant coolly on the window-sill, looking into the room, and remarked, almost loud enough for Joseph to hear him, 'The gent must be cranky!'

Joseph returned to the window, and gave him the bundle, saying, 'There—now go away, there's a good man!' But Smoucher, who had made up his mind that something was wrong, began to grow impertinent.

'Beg yer pardon, sur,' he said, 'but couldn't you throw in a tater or two?'

Joseph fetched several potatoes from the table, which he hastily thrust into Smoucher's handkerchief.

'There,' said Joseph, nervously; 'now be off.'

'Beg yer pardon again, yer honour,' continued the troublesome Smoucher, 'but eatin' 's dry work, and I should like to drink yer honour's 'elth at this 'ere festive season.'

'There's sixpence—now go away,' replied Joseph, his nervousness increasing as he pushed Smoucher from the window.

'I shall never forget yer honour.'

'No more!' shouted Joseph, in a frenzy; and Smoucher disappeared; while Joseph sank exhausted against the window-sill, like a sea-sick passenger near the bulwarks of a vessel.

The stiff waiter had entered the room and lighted the gas, before Joseph was aware of his hateful presence. When Joseph turned and saw him there, he sank in a chair near the window, regarding him wildly, and still holding the sill with one hand.

'Take away, sir?' asked the stiff waiter.

'Y-e-s,' replied Joseph, in a faint and agitated voice; 'take away.'

'Aint you well, sir?' inquired the stiff waiter, with unwonted tenderness.

'I feel a little qualmy—a slight attack of indigestion—that's all.'

This was addressed to the stiff waiter, in answer to his inquiry; but the words fell upon a listless ear.

That individual was standing transfixed with astonishment before the empty dish that had contained the goose. Joseph divined what was passing in his mind. He had hardly calculated the effect that the discovery of the disappearance of the goose would have; and his qualminess increased. The stiff waiter was a man of few words, and he said nothing; but his look was awful—his stiffness seemed to in-

crease; and an attentive listener might have heard him say quietly, as he went out of the door carrying the empty dish, 'Well, if that aint a case of hapoplexy, this hotel's not the Royal George.'

A more serious phase in Mr Joseph Bowpot's dilemma now developed itself. The fact had dawned upon him that he had given away the silver gravy-spoon with the goose. Slight symptoms of insanity began to show themselves; he danced a little, and said something about stealing a gravy-spoon being seven years; and that when his Amelia and his mother saw him again he would be a ticket-of-leave convict. When the stiff waiter entered the room again, Joseph had calmed down somewhat, and was making a considerable display of combing his scanty hair before the mirror over the mantel-shelf.

The stiff waiter took a rapid survey of the apartment. As he was going out with the rest of the dishes, he said to Joseph, in his unusual subdued manner—

'Take cheese, sir?'

'Yes,' replied Joseph, with affected calmness; 'I think I will.'

'A whole cheese, sir?'

The sarcasm fell unheeded upon the ears of Joseph, who was too much occupied with a sudden project that he had conceived of getting out of the window, and scouring the town until he found the man he had given the goose and the spoon to. He felt the necessity of getting the spoon back at any cost. He did not feel courage enough to go out of the door, and therefore as soon as the stiff waiter's back was turned, he quickly slipped on his great-coat, and with some little difficulty squeezed himself through the open window into the street, sacrificing one of his braces in the struggle.

When the stiff waiter returned with the *whole* cheese—and found the apartment empty—he was *not* surprised; his suspicions were merely confirmed. The strange appearance—the strange behaviour—the bad shilling—the absence of luggage—all were conclusive proofs in his mind of a deliberate attempt, by an eccentric and accomplished swindler, to 'do' the Royal George Hotel. The notion he had once cherished, that Mr Joseph Bowpot was merely an excessively greedy visitor, who devoured all before him, regardless of appearances or apoplectic fits, now gave way to a strong belief that he was a swindler, at least, if not something worse—perhaps a burglar! The latter supposition was immediately confirmed by the entrance of the mistress of the hotel—a stout, red-faced woman, of the Mrs Bowpot school—as most women are who are left widows to manage hotels. The mistress of the Royal George was a prompt woman of business,

and without looking round the room, or without any preamble, she at once said to the stiff waiter:—

‘Emmanuel, where’s the silver gravy-spoon?’

‘Mim?’ said the stiff waiter, becoming at last very limp, and looking nervously at the open window.

‘The gravy-spoon?’ reiterated the decisive landlady, in a louder key.

‘Didn’t I bring it out, mim, with the dish?’ asked the now very limp waiter, very faintly.

‘No,’ was the prompt answer, like the blow of a hammer.

‘Then,’ returned the limp waiter, looking hurriedly round the room, ‘he’s taken it?’

‘Who’s taken it?’

‘The gent who was here just now; a regular burglar, mim; he eat the whole goose, and now he’s bolted with the plate.’

‘Ate a whole goose?’ asked the landlady, in utter astonishment.

‘Bones and all, mim; and he’s gone out o’ that window.’

The conversation was here interrupted by the opening of the coffee-room door, slowly and gently, and the appearance of Smoucher entering timidly, with his cap in one hand and a bundle in the other. Smoucher was not very well known in the town; for he had not been long down from London. The landlady, however, recognized him as an idle, dirty fellow, lounging about the Swindleham streets, and the excited imagination of the limp waiter pictured him as another of the desperate gang in league with the suspected Joseph. The landlady also began, as she thought, to see a concerted scheme to rob the place, and this induced her to be cautious, and even polite, in addressing Smoucher, in the hope of discovering what the plot really was; while the limp waiter was marvelling much why he was not immediately sent to the Swindleham lock-up.

‘What is it, my man?’ said the landlady, in an assumed cheerful tone, with courage on her lips but fear in her heart.

‘Beg yer pardon, mum,’ replied Smoucher, slowly advancing; ‘no offence, I hope; but is the short, stout party in, wot dined here?’

‘No, he’s not, at present,’ returned the landlady, very charmingly, now fully convinced that an accomplice stood before her, who was not yet ripe for unmasking.

‘Oh,’ said Smoucher, reflectively.

‘Anything I can do for you?’ kindly inquired the landlady.

‘No, thankee, mum,’ returned Smoucher, making a movement to

leave the room. 'I want to see the party myself on wery partickler bisness, and I'd better look in agen.'

This would not have suited the views of the affable landlady, and she therefore begged that Smoucher would take a seat, while she sent a messenger to fetch the gentleman. As the fire looked very comfortable, Smoucher accepted the offer, although so much politeness made him suspicious. The limp waiter, under the directions of his mistress, handed him a chair, on which he seated himself, depositing his bundle carefully between his legs. The limp waiter made a motion to relieve him of his burden, which Smoucher decidedly resisted.

'Thankee,' said he, rather doggedly; 'yer wery kind and attentive. It'll do wery well where it is.'

The waiter and the landlady having retired from the room to concert operations, leaving the door well guarded by nearly all the servants in the house, Smoucher's object in returning to the hotel was then developed in a little soliloquy which he muttered to himself as he sat before the fire:—

'I wonder whether that rum gent knew he wropp'd up a great silver spoon along o' that goose? It don't strike me he did. Howsomever, there can't be any harm in bringing it back. If I kep' it, I might get into trouble, an' the gent may stan' half-a-sov. if he gets it back on the quiet. I wonder what he guv' me that goose for?'

These reflections were interrupted by a noise outside the coffee-room door, which now stood a little ajar, and the quick eye of Smoucher detected the servants on the watch.

'Now, what *can* you mean?' thought Smoucher. 'This looks to me wery like a plant. That party's surely never been a doin' anything wrong, and a draggin' o' me into the mess? Oh, impossible! An' yet, what did he han' over that goose for? Bein' so precious lib'ral don't look wery serene! There's that blessed spoon, too. What a case it will be, if he comes in an' blabs out, with all that kit in the passage! This comes o' bein' honest.'

At this moment the distracted Bowpot, who had been running all round the market-place, and up the High Street, without, of course, finding Smoucher, appeared at the window, very much out of breath. He could scarcely trust his eyes when he saw Smoucher sitting by the fire, and he exclaimed in a very audible tone—'That form!' This caused Smoucher to look round, which drew from Bowpot another exclamation—'That face!' Saying which, he struggled through the window.

'I'm blow'd if he aint gettin' in at the window!' exclaimed the

astonished Smoucher. 'Oh, he must be cranky! He'll bust out about that spoon the wery first thing, an' I shall get lagged for petty larceny! I'll putend not to know 'im.'

Bowpot had by this time, at a sacrifice of waistcoat-band, got safely through the window, and he now advanced joyously towards Smoucher, exclaiming, breathlessly,—

'Why, how long have you been here? I've been looking for you everywhere.'

Smoucher, carrying out his determination, replied dubiously, 'I don't think I ever see you afore, sur.'

Bowpot, on hearing this, started back, crying aloud, 'That face! I can't be mistaken—it must be!' Smoucher was getting very uneasy, as he saw the coffee-room door open wider and wider. Bowpot continued—'Where's the gravy-spoon?'

Smoucher made several mysterious pantomimic signs, saying in a subdued tone—

'Don't be a blessed fool!'

'I a blessed fool!' shouted Bowpot, indignantly. 'Don't make faces at me, you ungrateful fellow! Is that the return for the goose I gave you? I say again, Where's the gravy-spoon?'

'It's all up!' said Smoucher, resignedly.

Bowpot's eye had caught sight of Smoucher's bundle, and he rushed towards it, exclaiming—

'Ha! what do I see? I know that handkerchief—I know that pattern!' He seized the bundle, and squeezing it, said joyfully, 'It's here!—I feel it! Yes; the gravy-spoon!'

He plucked the spoon out in triumph, threw the bundle again on the floor, and executed a feeble dance.

'There!' said Smoucher, sullenly, 'now you've done it!'

This remark applied to a rush of servants that he saw coming through the door. The boots and the limp waiter made it their business to seize Mr Joseph Bowpot; Smoucher was taken care of by an ostler and a stout stable-boy; while the mistress of the hotel, and a number of housemaids and chambermaids, made the background of the picture.

'Unhand me directly, sir,' said Joseph to the limp waiter.

'What game d'ye call this?' coolly asked Smoucher.

A scene of tremendous excitement now took place. A boy was despatched down the town for a single constable and the handcuffs. Poor Bowpot, after the first struggle, became paralyzed. One of the housemaids took up Smoucher's bundle and the remains of the mangled goose fell out.

‘The goose!’ exclaimed the limp waiter.

‘Lor!’ chorused the women.

‘How shameful it’s been treated,’ said the landlady, picking it up.

‘The accursed bird!’ faintly muttered Joseph.

‘Oh! aint he swearin’!’ announced the boots to the company generally.

‘There goes my supper,’ thought Smoucher.

‘The active ostler, boots, boys, and limp waiter began the precautionary task of bandaging the prisoners before the arrival of the town handcuffs.

‘You’re quite mistaken, you are indeed,’ said Joseph, appealingly; ‘I may be weak, but I am not guilty.’

‘I never see the gent afore to-day in my life,’ said Smoucher, ‘when he——’

What Smoucher was about to state was interrupted by a noise outside the coffee-room door, and a powerful female voice was heard, exclaiming, in indignant tones—‘Not a waiter; not a boots to take my luggage! Am I in a respectable hotel, or am I in a low pot-house!’

In that strong voice Bowpot heard the familiar tones of his mother; and although he felt somewhat ashamed of his position, he was relieved now of all fear of having to pass his Christmas Eve in the lock-up of Swindleham. Mrs Bowpot entered the room with a dignified air that was unmistakable. She knew her son was there, for the people at the station and the ’bus-man had told her so; but she was hardly prepared to find him with his arms bandaged with a tablecloth. At this moment the boy who had been sent for the constable returned, and, running past Mrs Bowpot, exclaimed—‘Oh, please, the constable’s laid up wi’ rheumatiz; but he’s sent his little gal wi’ the han’cuffs.’

Mrs Bowpot heard this, and she advanced to the shrinking but immensely relieved Joseph, speaking not so much to him as to the whole room.

‘Handcuffs! Joseph! What means all this? Are you mad—or drunk—or what?’

The landlady, impressed by Mrs Bowpot, had ordered the bandages to be removed, and the unfortunate Joseph was now at liberty. He saw that an explanation was necessary, and he attempted one:—

‘Respected parent, it is with feelings of the deepest humiliation that I appear before you in my present degraded position; but you’re the innocent cause—my education’s been neglected——’

‘To the point at once, sir,’ replied the respected parent, sternly.

‘I couldn’t help it,’ continued Joseph, wanderingly. ‘I planted my fork firmly in “4”—I gave my wrist a dexterous twist—I—’

‘Planted his fork firmly in four!’ shouted his mother. ‘He hasn’t injured any one? He hasn’t committed murder?’

Mrs Bowpot’s anxiety being relieved upon this point, and Joseph being evidently incapable, in his present depressed state, of giving anything like an explanation, Smoucher was left to clear up the mystery, and his own character at the same time, which he did as follows:—

‘I was a-standin’ in the market, a-waitin’ for any job as might turn up, when I see that gent a-beckonin’ o’ me at the winder. Course I walks up; when he ses to me, “Would you like a porshun o’ rost goose?”—them was his exact words—and I wasn’t fool enough, o’ course, to say no. Then he wrops up the goose in my handkercher, an’ along wi’ it he wrops up that wery spoon as all this blessed row’s about. Course, when I finds that out, I ses, That gent never meant to gie me that spoon; so I brings it back, and sees the gent, and was about to make it all right, when they ’as us both nailed for bu’glary.’

This clear statement of Smoucher’s satisfied all parties; and the servants retired to the kitchen to laugh over the story, while Joseph and his mother passed their Christmas Eve in a ‘private room.’ There Joseph learned that his mother, as soon as she awoke and found him missing, had, with her usual decision of character, got out at the first station where the train stopped; and finding, upon inquiry of the guard, that he must have been left behind at Swindleham, she took the next train back to that station, and after a few further inquiries, had traced him to the Royal George Hotel.

The next morning early they started for Little Mildhampton, where they safely arrived about lunch-time: receiving a welcome all the heartier for their unexpected delay. Joseph had seen the folly of being too reserved and timid; and warming up round the fire in the company of his Amelia, he told the story with great glee—although the laugh was often at his own expense—of how narrowly he had escaped spending Christmas Eve in the cage at Swindleham; and the difficulties he had contended with in his first attempt to carve roast goose.



THREE MASTERS.



WAS never anything but a fine old country gentleman, living upon my property, and passing the whole of my days in the sports of the field. The gun or the fishing-rod was seldom out of my hands, except when a scarlet coat was on my back, and I was on the back of my favourite steed. I was the steady, persevering amateur-butcher of my county, known and dreaded by the brute creation for miles and miles, and no huntsman's dinner, no angler's festival, was considered complete unless I consented to grace the board, either as the president or the honoured guest. No one ever thought me cruel, no one ever called me a brute; on the contrary, I was looked upon as a manly representative of a manly race, whose gradual decline and probable extinction was a great and irreparable loss to the country.

One day I went wild-duck shooting. My water-boots were out of order—in fact, I wanted a new pair; but the weather was so favourable for the sport, and I was so eager, that I could not wait until a proper equipment arrived from London. I knew I was flying in the face of danger—my old housekeeper (I have neither wife nor children) told me so; and when I came back at night, wet through to the legs, with very strong symptoms of inflammatory cold, no one in the house expressed any surprise, unless it was at my obstinate folly.

The sequel is soon told; a high fever followed, and as I had always been very free with brandy and old port wine, I was peculiarly open to an attack of this kind, and in a few days I gave up the ghost.

On knocking for admission, in the usual way, at the door of Elysium, I met with a very cold reception at the hands of the porter.

'I think, sir,' he said, 'you're a little afore your time?'

'How can that be?' I asked; 'I died in the regular way.'

'Not exactly in the regular way,' he replied, 'as far as I understand it; howsomdever, it's nothing to do with me; I've only got to obey orders, and to tell you that your little place inside is not half ready, and won't be finished for some years.'

'Come,' I said, getting indignant, 'enough of this nonsense; open the gate.'

'Oh,' he returned, sneeringly, handing me a written paper, 'this game won't do with me; I've seen too much of it.'

‘You rascal,’ I shouted, now fully enraged, ‘this impertinence shall be reported to your employers.’

‘Report away!’ he replied, laughing, ‘two can play at that. If a gent goes and commits suicide, or the next thing to it, he must take the consequences, that’s all.’

Before I could turn and strike him to the ground for this insult, he had closed the wicket, and I was left to grope my way once more in the outer darkness.

It was some time before I again reached daylight, and was able to read my paper. It fully authorized the remarks of the surly porter, by reproving me for the manner in which I had prematurely, and almost knowingly, put an end to a not very valuable or wisely-spent existence. It showed me how very closely such a piece of folly as I had been guilty of, in standing up to my waist in water half a-day in leaky boots, bordered upon the prohibited crime of self-destruction. My place in Elysium was not prepared for my reception, as I was not due for the next five and twenty years, and I was ordered to fill up the remainder of my allotted time on earth in the disagreeable condition of the metempsychosis.

Scarcely had I got to the end of his mandate, when I was felled to the ground; a darkness came over my eyes, which seemed to me to last for many hours; and when it cleared away, my soul had transmigrated, and I found myself a dog—a wretched, full-sized, half-fed cur, the property of a costermonger in the streets of London.

My master was poor, and considered savage; but as I had seen so much of sportsmen in my former state, I did not altogether agree with this opinion. We lived up a filthy court without a thoroughfare, just at the back of a pile of stately mansions, and my duty was to trot by the side of my master’s barrow during the day, and to keep guard over it all through the night. The work was hard and the food was scanty; but the latter was as much as my master could afford; and I was not in a position to complain of the former, when I recollected that I had put many animals to much more pain for my idle pleasure, than this man was compelled to inflict in the hard pursuit of a bare existence.

I was chained by a log to the street-door, which was kept open day and night, and my bed was a little rotten straw thrown down in the middle of the passage. I could not complain of this, as there were many children—dozens, perhaps—sleeping in the same house, who had no greater luxury under them. The square yard of our court was always half full of barrows, the property of the other

inhabitants, who were all costermongers, like my master. There were many dogs who guarded these barrows, as I guarded my master's; and when business was flat, and my master with some of his neighbours wanted a little amusement to raise their spirits, or to occupy their leisure, I was brought out, being a powerful dog, and set on to fight one or more of my four-footed companions. Here my master and my former self seemed to meet as sportsmen upon common ground, but it is surprising with what different feeling I regarded a dog-fight, when I was one of the combatants, instead of being one of the spectators. Sometimes a couple of precocious urchins—the glory of the court—would drag me out to make a match while their parents all the time stood joyfully by, delighted at the signs of promise exhibited by their hopeful offspring. I could not, however, complain in my secret heart—the heart of my former self—for I well remembered the day when my father took me, a little rosy-cheeked boy of four or five years of age, to pull the trigger of a gun which was placed across a gate, by which I shot a poor sparrow that was sitting chirping on a hedge, and blew his body into a hundred pieces. The policeman on duty in the neighbourhood of my master's court, sometimes came up, and put an end to these frequent dog-fights; and arbitrary as this interference of authority undoubtedly was, it struck me it might have been exerted with great advantage upon half the great sporting estates of the country. Sometimes lady visitors from the fine houses at our back came round, protected by gentlemen, to investigate the condition of the lower orders. Of course they were shocked at our brutal habits, and our savage nature; but one of the loudest-complaining ladies of the party forgot the time when I had seen her at her country-house, looking with delight through her gold eye-glass at the drawing of a sturdy badger.

One morning my master, either forgetting or being ignorant of the state of the law, fastened me to his barrow to help in drawing a heavy load—a task that I had anything but a relish for. I was obstinate, and would not pull, which so exasperated my employer, that he struck me several times with a stick across the back, as I had often struck an unruly horse in the country. This brutality—as it was called—was seen by several people, who cried 'shame;' and by a policeman, who took my master and his barrow into custody.

'What's the meaning of this flying in the face of an Act of Parliament?' asked the magistrate.

'I don't know anythin' about hacts,' said my master, 'I'm tryin' to get a livin'.'

‘Very likely,’ returned the magistrate, ‘but you’re not allowed to get it with dogs. You’re fined one pound.’

‘More shame for ’em,’ shouted my master, ‘he’s as strong as a ’os.’

‘You’re fined a pound,’ repeated the magistrate, closing all further controversy.

My master was not prepared to pay the fine upon the spot, and his barrow was, therefore, impounded while he went in search of the money. The policeman unhooked me to let me walk about the yard, and seizing an opportunity, I squeezed myself through a small space under a gate, and turned my back, for ever, upon my unfortunate master and his barrow.

I wandered for many hours about the town, getting very tired and hungry, for I had had nothing all day, except some milk which I had stolen out of a milk-can that stood open by some area-railings. My walk during the afternoon and evening had been through a very genteel, not to say aristocratic, part of the metropolis, where the roads and gutters were swept so very clean, that they formed a desert of perfect hopelessness to a half-starved dog, like myself. Shortly after dusk I found myself in a low outskirt of the town, that would have been country, but for a long range of cinder heaps, that blackened the whole prospect. Going some distance past these black hills—still on the main road—I came suddenly upon a small, wretched hut, one half of the rafters of which were visible through the roof. As I was lingering in front of this building, the door suddenly opened, and a man stood full in the doorway. He seemed astonished and glad to catch sight of me, and beckoned me in with friendly signs, and the additional temptation of a piece of bread. I did not altogether like the place, but the man appeared friendly, the food was very tempting after a long tramp, and a longer fast, and at last I entered. The man closed the door behind me, as I was eating the bread, and then called to some one who was in the back part of the premises. A shrill voice answered the call, and shortly afterwards an old, sooty-faced woman made her appearance, who was much more repulsive in my eyes than the man. He was powerful, rough, and gipsy-like in aspect; while she was sinewy, witch-like, and fierce in expression. They stood at some distance from me, conversing in a low tone, while I was busy with the food the man had given me.

‘Three ’arf crowns, at least,’ said the woman, eagerly, ‘for a skin like that.’

‘No,’ said the man, sternly, ‘I won’t ’av’ it. I can sell him alive for that.’

‘Keep ’im, then,’ replied the woman, sharply, ‘an’ see ’im eat ’is ’ed orf in two days.’

‘I’d like to keep ’im altogether,’ returned the man, looking at me with admiration,—‘a fine fellow.’

‘We don’t want money, do we?’ asked the woman, with a savage expression; ‘cinder-sifting will bring it in a ’urry, won’t it?’

This last speech seemed to have the desired effect upon the man, for the next moment I found myself in his powerful grasp, out of which there was no escape, and I saw the woman coming towards me with a bright, sharp-pointed knife. Putting the previous conversation and these signs together, it was not difficult to understand that their object was to skin me alive for the sake of my skin, which is doubled in value when taken from a living animal. Looking back at my past self, I was conscious of many things that I had connived at in quiet country places, not very different from this, without having the excuse of hard necessity as some sort of palliation. These were my human reflections; and while I was indulging in them, my animal instincts had taken care of my miserable body, by causing me to yell and howl at the top of my voice. The man tried to stop this uproar, by clasping my jaw, but I gave him so much trouble to hold me down in my struggles, that he was compelled to let me howl to my heart’s content. Just as the old hag had got me into a position favourable to her operations, the door of the hut burst suddenly open, and several men stood in the room, and crowded round the doorway. The old woman dropped her knife, and the man dropped me to face the unwelcome intruders, who were a party of excursionists going home in a van, and while passing the hut they had been arrested by my howls of distress. The man and woman offered some rambling explanation, but it was of no avail, and the two miscreants, as they were called, were taken to town by my deliverers, to answer the charge of cruelty to a dog. The next morning, before a magistrate, they were sentenced each to three months’ imprisonment with hard labour, amidst the applause of a crowded court; and I slunk away once more unobserved, to seek my fortunes in another direction.

My last night’s experience had taught me to avoid the outskirts of the town; of the country I did not feel a very high opinion; and I therefore turned in a way that I supposed must lead me towards the centre of the metropolis. I had not gone far when I entered a spacious park, with well-dressed ladies and gentlemen, with livery servants, horses, carriages, and every sign of luxury and wealth. I again began to feel the pangs of hunger, which came on with most annoy-

ing regularity; and as I could find nothing eatable upon the trim gravel walks, I took the liberty of snapping a large bun from the hand of a grossly over-fed boy in a velvet dress. The child was almost paralyzed with fright, and before it could turn round and complain to its nurse, who was flirting with a very long, thin soldier, who seemed all legs, I was fairly out of sight amongst the trees. Going past a seat of one of the most pleasant parts of the park, my attention was drawn to a very benevolent-looking, stout, middle-aged gentleman, who wore spectacles, through which he was reading a book. There was something so delightfully calm—so comfortable—so good-humoured and respectable about this person, that I could go no farther, but lay upon the ground with my tongue hanging out, and my tail wagging in a most imbecile manner. If fate, I thought, had but given me such a master, I could have carried baskets, fetched sticks out of ponds and rivers, stood upon my hind-legs, or performed any other well-known canine feats in a transport of joy and thankfulness. I was not long in this attitude before I attracted the attention of the placid gentleman, who gave me such signs of encouragement, as he slowly arose to go away, that I followed him meekly without any hesitation. We did not go far before we entered a quiet, spacious square, at a large corner house of which my new acquaintance appeared to reside. When he rang the bell the door was immediately answered by a servant in livery.

‘George,’ said the old gentleman, very mildly, ‘take this dog in and see him properly provided for.’

The benevolent gentleman’s commands were instantly obeyed; and, in a few minutes, I found myself in a large dog’s-house in a stable at the end of the garden, with a large pan of water and a large dish of bones and broken meat before me. When I had satisfied my hunger, and began to feel more happy, I looked about me, and I saw three other dogs’-houses of various sizes. In one of these was a small black-and-tan terrier; in another a dog much larger, of the Scotch terrier breed; in another a still larger dog of the bull-terrier kind; while I made the fourth and largest, being a mixture of the Newfoundland and the shepherd’s dog. I learned in conversation with my new friends, who were all very sociable, that one had been bought of a man in the streets, another had been presented to the old gentleman by a friend, and the third had been encouraged to follow our master in the same way as I had. They were all well-fed and well-attended to, being taken out in turns by the servants for exercise, but never by their master. They had speculated much upon the

character of the old gentleman, but they had not arrived at any satisfactory conclusion. He was not a dog-fancier, that was certain, nor was he of a sporting turn (I winced at this phrase), for he never went to the country; and why they were kept there, as if to be looked at, and yet were never looked at, was a mystery they were unable to unravel, even with my intelligent assistance.

For some weeks I was kept in the state my companions had described, and I began to get rather weary of the monotony of my life, when one morning there seemed to be an unusual stir in the house, and shortly after breakfast several servants came down to the stable, and took the whole four of us in a body into the dining-room. The placid old gentleman, our master, was there, and several other old gentlemen equally respectable in appearance, equally adorned with spectacles, and equally placid in their manners.

‘George,’ said our master, mildly, to one of the servants, ‘is the surgery prepared?’

‘Quite prepared, sir,’ replied the servant.

‘Will you be kind enough, then,’ said our master, very blandly, ‘to carry out my instructions?’

Upon these orders the black-and-tan terrier was first taken away, and, after the lapse of a few minutes, the servants returned for the Scotch terrier, and, after that, for the bull-terrier. Although we were walking about the dining-room before being removed to the surgery, the gentlemen assembled with our placid master took no notice of us, but kept up an animated conversation amongst themselves near the windows that looked into the square in front. At last, my turn came, and I went with my conductor, and some little misgivings, towards the surgery. When I got there, before I had time to observe what had become of my companions, I was seized by several men, and fastened on a rack which held me firmly, face upwards, extended by the four legs, and in my mouth was placed a round block of wood, which prevented my making a noise. Scarcely had the servants settled me in this uncomfortable position, when I was conscious of the room being filled with the placid gentlemen, and of a very strong smell of drugs and physic.

‘Since our last meeting, gentlemen,’ said a voice, which I recognized as our master’s, ‘as you are probably aware, I have carried on a controversy in the public prints with a correspondent who signs himself “Canis Familiaris.” It is not for me, in this room, to speak of my own triumphs, but it must be evident to you all that a mere theorist like my anonymous opponent can have little chance in an

argument with an unflinching experimentalist like myself. When Canis Familiaris asserts that a decoction of Apocynum (the common poisonous plant known as dog's-bane) will not kill a healthy dog, I silence him for ever when I reply that I have administered with my own hands fourteen different doses of this vegetable poison to fourteen different dogs of various sizes, and that I have their lifeless bodies now in my dissecting-room, as a proof against all the world.'

A murmur of satisfaction was heard from the placid gentlemen after this speech, mingled with the clatter of glasses. At first I supposed our time had come, and that draughts of dog's-bane were being poured out for our immediate destruction; but I found from the smell that sherry was being drunk, and from the thick voices of the placid gentlemen that biscuits were being eaten.

'Doctor Borax,' said our master, with an ill-suppressed air of triumph, 'do you still adhere to your assertion that the fossil we have here is not the remains of the common dog?'

'I do, distinctly,' replied Dr Borax, rather indistinctly, for his mouth was half full of biscuit.

'Very well,' returned our master, with a chuckle, 'I assert the contrary; and, what is more, I am prepared to prove, by direct comparison, that the fossil is the remains of one of two dogs—the Scotch terrier, or the bull-terrier.'

Another murmur of satisfaction ran round the room at the close of this confident remark, mingled still with the clatter of wine-glasses, and the crunching of crisp biscuits.

'Here,' said our master, with the air of a conjuror, placing his hand upon a substance which made a hollow sound, 'I have a full-grown, healthy specimen of the bull-terrier, and here' (there was another hollow sound) 'I have an equally favourable specimen of the Scotch terrier.'

There was a general movement at this point amongst the placid gentlemen, as if for examination; and I judged rightly from the two hollow sounds that my unfortunate dog-companions were similarly situated to myself close to where our master stood, and that he had caused the noise by dropping his hand upon their extended stomachs. When the placid gentlemen appeared to be satisfied, our master clinked a small table-bell, which was immediately answered by the usual servant.

'George,' said our master, 'take those two dogs down to Mr James in the dissecting-room, who will prepare them according to my instructions.'

While these orders were being carried out, my master resumed his discourse.

‘Gentlemen,’ he said, ‘to return in the interim to this question of the effect of the vulgar poison known as dog’s-bane, upon the common dog; I am prepared to show you how erroneous is the general impression that the greater the size of the animal, the greater will be the power of resisting the action of this deadly herb. I have proved by the fourteen dogs that I have already destroyed, that dog’s-bane is not merely an ignorant, groundless title for a common plant (as asserted by *Canis Familiaris*, and many others), but that it is the most nauseous and effective poison that can be administered to the whole canine race.’

Another murmur of approval followed this speech, still joined by the clatter of wine-glasses.

‘Let us understand you distinctly, doctor,’ said a very mild gentleman in the room, who appeared to be taking notes; ‘you say a large dog will expire under an equal dose of dog’s-bane, earlier than a smaller dog?’

‘I do,’ returned the doctor, proudly; ‘and to carry out my invariable plan of experiment, I have provided a small black-and-tan terrier, and a large specimen of the mixed Newfoundland and shepherd breed, upon both of which it is my intention to operate before your eyes.’

Alarmed as I was at the danger of my position, I could not help indulging in reflections upon nice distinctions; and as I had learned how fine was the line which divided suicide from an obstinate running into fatal danger, I was now anxious to know why my two former tormentors were punished by an offended law, while this little knot of half-employed doctors, without any secrecy, could destroy a hundred animal lives for the sake of a crotchety theory, and be protected by the broad shield of cold-blooded and pretended science.

While I was occupied with these thoughts, I heard a faint gurgling sound, which I presumed came from my small companion, the black-and-tan terrier, as he swallowed the fatal dose. My master then came towards me with a funnel and a goblet containing a dark liquid; and I endeavoured to soften his heart by a piteous, appealing look. My effort was thrown away upon a pompous, self-sufficient, shirt-frilled, attitudinizing smatterer of science: the funnel was inserted in my half-opened mouth, by the side of the gagging-block; the horrid draught was poured down my parched throat; my heart sickened, as the fumes of a hundred druggists’-shops arose to my

brain ; my eyes closed, and I seemed to fall headlong through the earth.

Ill, I had been—very ill—and weak, I remained, without a doubt, lying upon my bed in my own room in the country, attended by my doctor and my old housekeeper. The cold I had caught in the duck-pond had turned to brain fever, and I had been long delirious. The first use I made of my slowly returning strength was to put a little more humanity into my field-sports ; to change my rod and gun for a ball and a bat, and to make a bowling-green and a cricket-ground of unrivalled excellence upon my estate ; to which all the lads of the country are always welcome.

WANTED, A SECRETARY.



THINK the first effort I made to obtain any important post was in a parochial direction : I went in for assistant vestry-clerk of the influential parish of Saint Spankus Within. In obedience to a very promising and inviting advertisement, which appeared three times consecutively in the two leading newspapers, I sent in my application, carefully worded and neatly written, sealed, endorsed, and directed, accompanied by numerous and satisfactory testimonials, to the chairman of the vestry, and awaited impatiently the morning appointed for a personal attendance. It came at last, and dressed in what I considered the most judicious and becoming style, I proceeded to the vestry-hall. I was twenty years of age, prepossessing in appearance, tolerably well educated, a good penman, a better accountant, a skilful correspondent, and a person who might have been entrusted with the keys of the cellars of the Bank of England. All these qualities—and many more—my testimonials set forth as only testimonials can, and do ; and I considered myself extremely well armed for the contest.

When I arrived at the scene of battle, I found about forty competitors assembled, of all ages, sizes, and appearances. Some were mere lads, far younger than the age specified in the advertisement (between twenty and thirty) ; some were evidently men near forty, perhaps, with families at home, anxiously waiting to know their fate ; others were jaunty youths who lived with their parents, and who did

not care much whether their application turned out a success or a failure.

There was one man present whose air of carefully prepared respectability, covering his poverty like a thin transparent veil, particularly attracted my attention. I watched his nervous, care-worn, despairing countenance, full, even to my inexperienced eye, of a history of wasted energies, want of self-reliance, and a weak dependence upon friends and expected patrons. I met him several times afterwards, under similar circumstances, always the same, hopeless, helpless creature; applying for everything and getting nothing, a burden upon his friends, and a useless clod upon the earth.

We were all placed in a waiting-room, into which the vestry-hall opened; and when the messenger passed in and out, we got brief glimpses of the somewhat noisy and undignified body of parish senators, who were to decide our fate. Some of us collected in little conversational groups, discussing our different prospects, showing each other the rough drafts of the applications we had sent in, and indulging generally in a good deal of weak, verbal criticism.

Suddenly, our consultations were interrupted by the loud voice of a porter from the vestry-hall door, calling the name of 'Bates.' This was the first applicant called in—an ordinary-looking lad, who had kept aloof from the rest of the company. As soon as he had gone in to be examined, a short young man who stood next to me, whose name I forget, but whom, because of his sharp nose and quick, restless eyes, I shall call the Weasel, hastily examined a paper that he held in his hand, and then said, reflectively—

'Oh!—oh! Master Bates—I smell a rat!'

I, of course, asked him what supposed discovery had led to this observation.

'Well,' said he, 'look here. Isn't a man named Bates the chairman of the vestry? Isn't a man named Bates the vestry clerk? Isn't a man named Bates the relieving officer? And are there not several men of the name of Bates upon the vestry?'

I was compelled, looking over the parochial list, to reply in the affirmative.

'Yes,' he returned, 'and young Bates is safe for the post, mark my words!'

We were called in, one by one, before the vestry: about fifty men, chiefly shopkeepers, sitting at a board covered with green baize and writing materials. Our applications were read, and a few

questions put to us, having answered which we were suffered to withdraw.

After a few hours consumed in this way, we had all been examined in our turn, and it was announced to us that three candidates had been selected, from whom one would be elected to fill the post, at one o'clock precisely, on that day fortnight. The names were Bates, the Weasel, and myself.

'I told you so!' said the Weasel, 'I can see it all. I shall come on the day appointed, to see the end of the job; but I shan't take any trouble about it whatever.'

So spake the Weasel, and if I had had faith in his words, I might have saved myself a deal of unnecessary, unproductive labour. But I was young, fresh, and trusting; and, perhaps, a trifle suspicious that my sharp little friend intended to make herculean efforts, for all his assumed indifference. In an evil moment I procured a list of the vestrymen—with their names and addresses—and went home to arrange an energetic and methodical canvas.

'I wrote upwards of three hundred letters; all after a form that I had prepared; and, when I had finished them, I started with a thick pair of boots and a good umbrella to take them round; leaving them where I could not see the persons required, and obtaining an interview where it was possible.

I canvassed for ten days in the most active and persevering manner. I saw butchers and butchers' wives in little boxes at the end of greasy shops, both in the calm and soapsuds of an afternoon, and in the hurry and bustle of a killing morning, when infuriated bulls were tearing up the backyard, and heavy sheep were running headlong between people's legs. I saw grocers in large busy shops, and introduced my business, as well as I could, amidst the grinding clatter of steam coffee-mills in full operation. I saw bakers on the subject, who came up, unwillingly, in the cold out of warm bake-houses, with their shirt-sleeves tucked up, their naked feet in loose slippers, and looking as white as the Pierrot in a pantomime. I went into tallow-chandlers' shops, enduring the combined smell of oil, candles, paint, size, and soap, to obtain an interview with one of the men in power. I went into large upholsterers' warehouses, and after toiling up-stairs and down, in garrets and cellars, and along rooms filled with furniture that I could scarcely thread my way through, found a clerk in authority at last, stuck in a small counting-house, amidst a forest of bedsteads, who kindly informed me that his master was in Paris, and not expected home for six weeks.

Some shops that I went to were in the charge of dirty boys, who, the moment I entered, rang a bell, bringing down the proprietor, in the middle of his dinner, from an upper story, who did not always receive me very politely, and who cursed the official position that exposed him to such interruptions at such a period of the day. Sometimes it was a public-house that required a visit, and the landlord was brought out of the cellar in the midst of fining or adulterating the beer, to listen to my views uttered across the sponge-cakes on the counter inside the bottle-entrance. Sometimes it was a livery-stable keeper; and, if he happened not to be in the very neat, clean house at the entrance to the yard, I had to seek him amongst plunging horses, and whizzing ostlers.

Then, at private houses, I saw, or tried to see, doctors, lawyers, clergymen, and retired gentlemen; some I caught just as they were going out in the morning, and took a hurried interview upon the doorstep; some I found at the moment they were coming home hungry to dinner, in no mood to be trifled with by any man, much less by me. In some instances I had long periods of waiting for an interview, in dingy parlours, looking at a piano, an ornamental book upon a round table, and two awful portraits in oil of the master and mistress of the house. Sometimes I passed about the same period of time in a luxurious dining-room, the brilliant carpet of which, to my horror, bore two muddy footprints of my own boots.

Once I was an unwilling auditor of a little domestic squabble, which was occurring in a back-parlour closed in with folding-doors; and I don't think I made the impression upon the master of the house that I should have done, if he had been a little calmer, and not quite so red in the face. Many of my interviews were with old ladies of different ages and appearances, who, in their husbands' or brothers' absence, undertook to transact business for them. Numbers whom I saw, belonged to that section of the vestrymen who seldom or never went near the hall; and others must have been that active, public-spirited fifty before whom I went on the day of the examination; and who although, perhaps, they received me more courteously than the rest, had arranged who was to fill the office, weeks and weeks before it was even advertised.

Feeling assured that my exertion had not been thrown away, I went with some degree of confidence to the vestry-hall on the day of election. Our waiting-room was dull enough now, for only the Weasel and myself were there; for some reason, Master Bates did not make his appearance. The Weasel still adhered to his opinion

about the successful candidate, and a quarter of an hour proved him to be correct. Master Bates was announced as the parochial favourite.

I was a little damped in my ardour by my ill success in this first attempt, but I took courage, and did not suffer any advertisements to escape me. I had repeated interviews with a great number of very curious people, engaged, so I presumed, in the getting up of public companies. I found that the amount of cash deposit required to insure my honesty and fidelity varied from five to five hundred pounds. In some instances I was invited, not to say required, to take an interest in the undertaking, and place myself in the desirable position of an equal with the chairman and directors. In one case they wanted a thousand shares placed upon the market, a phrase at that time totally beyond my comprehension; in another, they required two or more passable men, with good names and addresses, to be introduced, to complete the board of directors.

Sometimes it was a company for supplying opera-glasses in any quantity, at twopence per night, with the option of purchase at eighteenpence; sometimes, a company for introducing the manly game of skittles in Paris, and throughout continental Europe; sometimes for working a copper-mine in a remote part of Cornwall; sometimes for constructing a railway (under government guarantee), whether the inhabitants liked it or not, in the interior of China. Sometimes it was an inventor, who had got a patent that promised golden harvests, and a little knot of men rallying round him, with quite as much ingenuity, but unfortunately with just as little capital as he; coal-mines, iron-works, slate-quarries, plans for class education, life, fire, water, and loan-offices, and travelling panoramic exhibitions, alike wanted a secretary, who could do something for them beyond the power of man, or such a man as I was, to perform; and, of course, my numerous letters and interviews ended in nothing.

Occasionally, coming out of one door as I was going in at another, or walking up a street as I was walking down, I thought I caught a passing glimpse of the faded respectability and the careworn face of the man I had particularly noticed at the parish contest.

I next became one of a body of about fifty candidates who answered the invitation of a committee of a public charity about to appoint a second secretary. It was called the Society for the Promotion of—something which I forget now; but I do not think I should be far wrong if I said for the Promotion of the comfort of its body of officers. The house was in a leading thoroughfare—a substantial mansion,

adorned with an imposing front of four Ionic columns. There was an entrance-hall, with a stout porter in a large black leathern chair and a most luxurious livery. There was a waiting-room furnished with the thickest of Turkey carpets, the solidest of chairs and tables, neat book-cases filled with large richly-bound books, and portraits of heavy men in the costume of a bygone time. We were shown into this comfortable apartment, supported by charity, by the stout charity porter, and we took our places on the chairs ranged round the walls, and stared at each other in blank silence. Presently the door opened, and the gorgeous porter came in with a paper in his hand, and read the first name in an impressive manner. It was mine. I followed him up a broad stone staircase, richly carpeted, and across a wide landing-place, ornamented with more pictures, to the board-room, entering which, I found myself in the presence of the governors of the place. They were, as far as I can recollect, without an exception, stout, red-faced, full-blooded men, in white neckcloths and glossy black coats. The charity they administered was the proceeds of a large amount of public benevolence engrafted upon an old bequest of some man who had died in the reign of Henry VIII., and whose property had increased in value from year to year to an extent that the bequeather could never have dreamed of.

The room below was comfortable, but the board-room was perfectly luxurious. A warm, rich, full, purple glow fell from the walls, the curtains, and carpets, upon the faces of all the committee. They looked as if their charity, as usual, had begun at home, by taking care of every man who was fortunate enough to be upon that board. I went through the usual examination. The handwriting was mine; the testimonials were mine; I had never committed forgery; I was a member of the Church of England, the right church for the institution.

I bowed myself out; and, going down the stairs, I saw standing in the hall, my careworn friend of the parochial contest, looking several shades more faded than ever. I spoke to him kindly, and he asked me to walk with him for a few minutes up the street. I took him to a neighbouring tavern, where I paid for a dinner, of which he seemed in no degree unwilling to partake. He told me that, when he arrived at the institution, and saw upon what a scale of magnificence everything was conducted, his heart failed him, and he felt that his appearance was not sufficiently respectable to carry weight with the directors, even if he had been bold enough to go amongst us in the waiting-room to take his turn. Lingerer undecided in the hall, he got into conversation with an under-porter (not the gorgeous man

in livery), who told him, confidentially, that the meeting about the secretaryship was all humbug, and was merely held to give a colourable pretext for electing a young man—the nephew of the vice-president—who had been filling the office on trial for some months past. The porter volunteered this information because he hated the man who was going to get in; and he said further, that the present proceedings were only taken to throw dust in the eyes of a few members of the board, and to appear to comply with certain standing rules of the institution. The experience I had gained during the last few years taught me to believe this, and I went home to await the result of my apparently favourable examination, without the slightest hope or expectation of success. The next day I received a sealed letter appointing another examination in a week. When the time arrived, I went up and found the original fifty candidates reduced to ten; the man the porter had spoken of, being (of course) one. We were called up separately, as before, and underwent an examination in no respect different from the last. The next day I received another sealed letter appointing a third examination in a week. I went again mechanically, and found, this time, two candidates besides myself: the vice-president's nephew being still one of us. Another examination—more hurried than the last—took place, and we then went away. Of course the vice-president's nephew got the place.

For a few years I gave up secretaryship hunting, and married Amelia. I shall not describe Amelia; but merely state that we lived a quiet, happy existence, doing positively nothing. One evening over the dinner-table Amelia spoke as follows:—

‘Do you know, Edgar, that they’ve made father chairman of that Steam Burial Company?’

‘I do, Amelia,’ I rejoined.

‘Well, don’t say anything, but he intends to make you the manager.’

‘No!’ I exclaimed, and the old war-horse again sniffed the battle afar off.

This time I remained perfectly passive. I saw advertisements in the papers, headed ‘A Manager Wanted,’ and referring to the Golgotha Cemetery and Steam Burial Company. I was instructed—I say instructed—to send in a certain application, and I sent it. I have no hesitation in stating this, because the company has long since been wound up. On the day of examination I went down in my father-in-law’s brougham (very different from the days when I used to look upon a chairman as a Hindoo does upon Brahma), and I was person-

ally introduced to one or two of the safe directors. I was ushered into a small side office, where I could see the waiting-room through a curtain. There was the usual number of applicants, standing and sitting—just such a group as I had formed one of, many a time. Amongst them was my poor old, shabby, faded friend, looking many degrees more faded, and careworn, and threadbare than ever. I pitied them all, for I had a fellow-feeling with them. One by one they were examined and went away; hoping, or confident, or desponding, as their natures or their necessities prompted.

The directors of the late Golgotha Company certainly deserve praise for one thing—they elected me at a single sitting, and spared the sufferings of those other weary watchers who watched them, and who may be watching others still, for those crumbs of bitter patronage that seldom or never fall to the poor stranger, however worthy, from the fulness of a rich board-room table.

DOMESTIC CASTLE-BUILDING.

 ever I allow my husband, Mr Popjoy, to have his own way, I always make a mistake. Mr Popjoy is very well in his business, as a clerk in the City; but, take him out of that, and he knows no more of the world than a babe unborn. If I trust him to select our Sunday's dinner from one of the City markets, he brings home a huge watery fish; a side of meat sufficient for a barrack-full of soldiers; or a goose, as large and fluffy as a child's feather-bed, and no sweeter than it should be. Mr Popjoy (though I am grieved to say it of my own husband) is frequently taken in by designing persons, who ought to be picking oakum at the Old Bailey, or some other penal settlement. Whenever I see him pass the parlour window at exactly half-past six in the evening (his usual time of returning from business) with a peculiar smirk of satisfaction upon his face, I know that something is wrong. When, after delaying a little, to excite my curiosity, he proudly places a brace of pheasants upon the table, which he has bought for one and sixpence, of a man in the street, dressed in a smock-frock, I know, before I examine the birds, that they are stuffed with sand, and that one half of them will go to feed the cat, and the other half to the dust-bin. When Mr Popjoy brings home a pair of patent boots as

an unexpected present for one of the children, I know, before I put my hands upon them, that they are made of brown paper; and when the soles burst clean away from the upper leather in trying them on the child, I can only say, 'It's just as I expected.' Mr Popjoy buys stationary of men who stand in the gutter, and we are, consequently, always well stocked with note-paper upon which no one can write, because it sucks up the ink like a piece of shirting. We have a dozen umbrellas in the house, none of which would shelter a dog, Mr Popjoy having bought them of people who were selling off under prime cost, because their premises were coming down for a new street, or a new chapel. Sometimes Mr Popjoy's bargain-hunting propensities get him into serious difficulties, out of which he expects me to extricate him.

On one occasion, he strayed into a nest of swindlers—a mock auction-mart—and before he had been there twenty minutes, he had nodded himself into two cart-loads of trashy furniture, at prices six times higher than their proper value. When the rascals came after him with the goods in vans, I refused, of course, to take them in, and as Mr Popjoy solemnly assured me that he had only bid for a dressing-case as a present to me on my approaching birth-day, of course I believed my husband, snatched the dressing-case from the hands of one of the men, put the money upon the door-step, and slammed the door in their faces, after telling them to do their best and to do their worst. Mr Popjoy would never have had spirit to do this, but I had; and, as I never heard any more of the wretches from that day to this, I feel that, as usual, I did what was right.

Mr Popjoy's failing for bargain-hunting at one period extended to houses; and, during the time we have been married (about fifteen years), if we have moved once we have moved a dozen times. Mr Popjoy usually employs his holidays in searching for new dwellings, and new neighbourhoods, although we have taken a long lease of the house in which we now reside; and I have positively resolved never to move again, unless compelled by utter necessity, until I am carried to my grave.

Mr Popjoy, as I have said before, moves in City circles, and very often, I am sorry to say, becomes acquainted with persons who do him no good, and only cause him to injure his family. More than once he has made himself surety, and has had to pay sums of money for worthless scamps, which I have had to provide out of a legacy securely settled upon me by an aunt. He is always coming home with a story of how he could make a little fortune if he only had a

hundred pounds to play with for three months; but I have turned a deaf ear to him, or I know very well where poor aunt's little property would be, and what would be left for the dear children when they grew up.

One evening Mr Popjoy came home about his usual time to tea, and brought with him a person whom he introduced to me as Mr Gasper. I never take kindly to strangers, because I believe they have designs upon Mr Popjoy, and I am generally right. I consider my own and my husband's family, and our old friends, quite as large as we can afford to keep up with and entertain, without adding fresh faces continually to the number. I did not like Mr Gasper, the moment he came into the room, and my unfavourable impression did not alter upon further acquaintance. He was much too polite to please me; inquiring after my health and the children's, as if he had known us twenty years. He was younger than my husband—perhaps about forty years of age—and had a sneaking expression upon his countenance. When he spoke, he lifted up his head, half-opened his mouth, and half-closed his eyes, as if very short-sighted, and made much use of a double eye-glass. I believe he was a good deal sharper in his sight than either Mr Popjoy or myself.

When we were seated at the tea-table, Mr Gasper opened the conversation, my husband remaining very quiet, and appearing more nervous than usual, as if he had something upon his mind.

'Mrs Popjoy,' said Mr Gasper, 'I am indebted to a very unexpected circumstance for the pleasure of your esteemed acquaintance: Mr Popjoy has this day expressed a wish—in fact, I may say, has made arrangements—to participate in the many advantages to be derived from the General Freehold Society of the Banded Brothers of Freedom.'

I hate to be addressed with anything like an oration; it shows me plainly that the speaker is not straightforward.

'Mr Gasper,' I said, 'my husband, Mr Popjoy, has joined many absurd societies in his time, to his children's cost. He has walked in a procession with a band of music in front of him, and a ridiculous sash round his waist, to dine with his company at Hornsey Wood, or some other remote tavern; but I never yet knew him want to join any society that sounded so much like a family of acrobats as the one you mention.'

'It's a very beneficial investment, my dear,' broke in Mr Popjoy.

'My dear madam,' returned Mr Gasper, laughing in a forced manner, 'Mr Popjoy very properly does not like to do anything with-

out consulting you, and hence my present visit. The Banded Brothers of Freedom is not in any way a convivial society. We never had such a thing as a public dinner, and we never shall. We exist only for plain and profitable business purposes.'

'I'm very glad to hear it,' I replied, 'for your own sakes; but profitable business, on his own account, is what my husband is least fitted for. He makes an excellent servant, but a very bad master.'

'My dear,' said Mr Popjoy, meekly, 'you know I never failed in anything but for want of capital.'

'My dear Mrs Popjoy,' continued Mr Gasper, becoming more bland and familiar every moment, 'I need not point out to you, as a woman of the world, the necessity of providing for a rising family, by seeking the most favourable investment for any little money it may have pleased fortune, in its bounty, to bestow upon us.'

'I don't believe in anything but the funds,' I replied, shortly.

'You will pardon me for saying that is a very great mistake. Suppose, for example, you have five hundred pounds in consols. It brings you in fifteen pounds a-year—safe, it is true, but what is it?'

'A comfortable little sum,' I replied, 'and one which some people find very convenient at times.'

I said this rather warmly and pointedly to my husband, for I now began to see the object of Mr Gasper's visit.

Mr Popjoy, wanting the courage himself, had doubtless brought home his new friend to persuade me into supplying the funds for shares in the Banded Brothers' Society, of which, I afterwards learned, Mr Gasper was the manager.

Mr Popjoy winced under my remark, and said nothing; but Mr Gasper continued his argument.

'There are other duties which we owe to society, Mrs Popjoy, and, through that, to our families, besides seeking for large dividends. Your esteemed husband has now lived in the world for five-and-forty years, without knowing what it is to enjoy a vote in the government of his country.'

'He's none the worse for that,' I returned.

'Pardon me,' replied Mr Gasper, 'a vote is money; and even if it was not, no intelligent man should be without it.'

'I quite feel that,' echoed Mr Popjoy.

'The General Freehold Society of the Banded Brothers of Freedom,' continued Mr Gasper, 'gives you that vote in the proportion of one to every five shares, besides creating in you that ennobling feel-

ing of satisfaction and independence which every man must experience who digs in his own garden, and lives in his own house.'

'That depends very much,' I replied, 'upon the character of the house and garden, and where they are situated.'

'Very true, Mrs Popjoy,' said Mr Gasper, 'very true, and in that remark I at once recognize the woman of experience. The position and prospects of the property belonging to the Banded Brothers of Freedom (whom I have the honour to represent), I am happy to say, cannot be assailed by any man with justice, and are only attacked by those who envy our social and political advantages.'

Mr Popjoy nodded approval at this speech, but I said nothing, allowing Mr Gasper to enlarge upon the details of his society without further interruption. Mr Popjoy was evidently bitten with the idea of becoming a small freeholder. It seemed to him to be the very thing he had been in search of for so many years without success. We had moved restlessly from house to house, taking no permanent root anywhere; but now we had come within sight of the promised land, and there seemed to be rest and happiness for us in the future.

This was Mr Popjoy's feeling, fostered by the judicious statements of the plausible Mr Gasper. I listened to the explanation of the complicated system under which the Banded Brothers of Freedom worked, without understanding half of what I heard; and I am afraid that my husband was no wiser than myself, although he nodded assent to every assertion, and seemed to be highly delighted with the whole scheme. A plan of the Banded Brothers' Estate was laid upon the table, after the tea-things were removed; and it looked, to me, very much like a large chess-board. Mr Gasper pointed to little square patches upon the paper, and told us how five shares purchased one patch, ten shares another patch, and fifteen shares a third; how A was a church, and B a dissenting chapel, C a projected park, D a row of shops, E an Artesian well of the purest spring water; how the broad lines were roads, the narrow line along the top the railway, and another line, close to it, the canal; and how the whole was twenty miles from London, in a salubrious part of a southern county, perfectly sheltered from the north winds, and to be reached in one hour by the railway. Then with regard to the financial system of the society, he told us how rent became capital, and the more we paid, the richer we became; how interest charged to the fathers was a benefit to the children; how every time we painted a water-butt we added a value to the heirlooms of our family; how the old snarling relations of landlord and tenant, creditor and debtor, were utterly destroyed, to be replaced by

a mutual-advantage state of existence. Then he drew a glowing picture of the toil-worn clerk, flying every evening from his city labour on the wings of steam to his happy country retreat, proud in the consciousness of being a free and independent burgess, who had, by prudence and co-operation, wrenched an acre of his birth-right from the grasping usurpation of the aristocracy. Such was the discourse of Mr Gasper until a late hour of the evening. His advocacy had no effect upon me, although it was conclusive with my husband, and I set my face resolutely against becoming a freeholder in the Banded Brothers' Estate.

Some few days after Mr Gasper's visit, I was attacked with a severe illness, which lasted for some weeks. When I recovered, I was ordered to Worthing for the benefit of one or two months' sea-air. Mr Popjoy came down every Saturday evening, and stayed until Monday morning. His mind still ran upon the idea of becoming a small freeholder—for he talked of little else during his visits. He enlarged very much upon the permanent benefit I should derive from a southern air, and he backed his arguments with a corroborative letter from my doctor, which I am compelled to believe he had obtained by connivance. I saw that there was little chance of domestic peace unless I consented to become a Banded Sister of Freedom, and, in a moment of bodily weakness, I gave him authority to sell out one hundred pounds of stock, and invest the money in any form he desired. I had a very slight hope that the Banded Brothers' Estate might turn out better than I had expected.

I had no hand in the moving—that was agreed between us—Mr Popjoy gladly superintending the whole of the arrangements. What things were broken, what things were lost, what the dear children suffered, is more than I need tell. My poor sister (she is now dead and gone), who came up from the country to assist my husband, told me afterwards she had seen many movings in her time, but nothing to equal this. It was worse than government emigration. It took them from six o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock at night to reach the Freehold Society's settlement. There were three vans and six men, who did just as they thought proper with Mr Popjoy, stopping at every roadside ale-house, until at last they got almost unmanageable. The way they threw the things from the van into the road was awful and heart-rending; and my poor sister said it was a mercy that everything was not shivered to atoms. As it was, the loo-table, which poor mother gave me when I was married, was so injured that it would never stand upright again; and her portrait in

oil, painted by a gentleman who might have been a Royal Academician if he had thought proper, had the legs of a kitchen-chair thrust through its face and neck in no less than three places.

At last the place was got into what Mr Popjoy considered something like order; and I left Worthing to return to my new home. It was late at night when I arrived, and very dark, and I noticed nothing until I reached the house, carefully guided by my husband.

‘My dear,’ said Mr Popjoy, ‘I am afraid you will not find the place everything you could wish; but Rome, you know, was not built in a day.’

I did not like the tone of this remark. It foreboded no good; but I made a cheerful reply, without leading him to suppose that I suspected anything.

When I entered our dwelling, I noticed a smell of earth, damp mortar, and new wood, and I thought I saw traces of shavings in the passage. Further acquaintance with the premises showed me many other shortcomings and peculiarities. There were no banisters up the stairs, and no paper upon the walls; which were ornamented with fantastic figures formed by the wet upon the plaster. The children’s bed-room and nursery were like stable-lofts, and the roof was only lathed over, without a ceiling. Luckily, the weather had been fine and dry for several weeks, or the poor creatures might have been washed down the stairs. The back parlour was closed up; and, for some time, Mr Popjoy hesitated when I spoke to him about this apartment. At last he admitted that it was in a very unfinished state. In fact, it had scarcely been commenced; there was nothing but a brick skeleton; there was no window, the hole being boarded over; and there was no floor, but a deep gulf half filled with rubbish, which, when cleared out, would form a very commodious back-kitchen. Mr Popjoy had prudently nailed up the door in the passage, and the two folding-doors in the front parlour which communicated with this rude outline of an apartment, because one of the children had accidentally fallen into the gulf, and had been lost to his brothers and sisters for several hours. This state of things required some explanation, and Mr Popjoy reluctantly and timidly proceeded to give it.

‘Mr Gasper’—— he began.

‘I thought so,’ I could not help interrupting.

‘Well, my dear,’ he continued, meekly; ‘I did all for the best, and it would have been better, no doubt, if I’d been governed by you.’

‘It ought to teach you a lesson,’ I said, ‘for the future.’

‘Mr Gasper,’ he resumed, ‘gave me five shares in the society of

Banded Brothers of Freedom in exchange for the money received from the Consols you authorized me to sell out. These five shares entitled me to a plot of land and the bare skeleton of a house; the society undertaking to finish the dwelling in the best style within two months, in consideration of my taking ten other shares (value two hundred pounds) which were to remain in the hands of the manager and committee until I had paid them up by quarterly instalments in the form of rent; when they would be delivered to me, constituting me the proprietor of the land and premises, to have and to hold for ever.'

'And you took the other shares?' I inquired.

'My dear,' replied my husband, 'I am sorry to say I did, under an arrangement by which, if the quarterly instalments were not kept up, the amount was to stand over indefinitely at ten per cent. per annum; one half of which interest went to pay working expenses, salaries, et cetera, and the other half formed a benefit fund for the relief of sick Banded Brothers of Freedom, or the support of their widows and orphans remaining on the estate.'

'A very pretty scheme,' I said—'upon paper.'

'The finishing of the house,' he continued, 'went on very slowly, even over our heads, and I begged your sister not to write to you about it, as I thought it would only worry you in the weak state you were in.'

'Well, Mr Popjoy,' I replied, when my husband had concluded, 'your restlessness has brought us to a cheerful dwelling, at last; but I suppose we must make the best of it. One thing I wish to have distinctly understood: I shall not associate with any of the Banded Brothers' wives, and I hope that you will keep equally aloof from any of the husbands.'

'Yes, my dear,' replied Mr Popjoy, much relieved by my tone and manner, 'I don't think you will be much troubled with either.'

It was not until the next day that I fully understood the meaning of this last remark; for I found that, with the exception of two other families, we were the only settlers upon the freehold estate.

The morning did not improve the aspect of the place. There was no washhouse at the back of the premises; nothing but a vast wild desert of gravel-pits. In the front of the house there were no area railings, although there was a deep area, and there was clay enough to make bricks for a hundred settlements. I found, upon looking over the children's wardrobe, that it had much suffered by this clay; and, when I inquired about several pairs of boots that were missing,

the clay was still the only answer I could get in explanation. Mr Popjoy had departed at an early hour, before I was up; for it was three miles to the station, four-and-twenty miles by railway to London, nearly two miles more into the City, and my husband had to be at business by half-past nine in the morning. After breakfast, I started to walk round and survey the settlement; but I had not gone far when I was stopped by more soft clay, large ponds of water, and impassable gravel-pits. There was no sign of life in my immediate neighbourhood; but I saw some children in the distance fishing with what appeared to be a small clothes-prop in one of the ponds, and I correctly supposed them to be members of the two other unfortunate settler families. There were several houses like our own in a very unfinished state; about a dozen half-raised carcasses; a few scaffold poles lying amongst gravel-heaps, rubbish, and old bricks; and this, as far as I could see, comprised all that was visible of the Great Estate of the Banded Brothers of Freedom. A, B, C, D, E—churches, chapels, projected parks, Artesian wells, canals, and even roads, were no more visible than Mr Gasper; but, instead, many ponds of water in which that plausible villain ought to have been soaking.

I returned to the house, and was astonished to see no workmen engaged in completing the building. I found upon inquiry from the children, that no one had been there for a week. The servant-girl, perhaps, might have given me more information; but, when I put any questions to her, she burst into violent fits of laughter, and seemed so thoroughly to enjoy the fun of living in such a wilderness, that I lost my patience, and gave her a month's warning upon the spot. When dinner-time arrived, I found there was no provision in the house, and no chance of getting any within eight miles. I then learned that Mr Popjoy was in the habit of bringing home supplies from town (with his usual judgment as to selection) about twice a-week, and that the last supply had been exhausted a day sooner than was expected. I waited impatiently for the approach of evening, sitting at the window, watching the road along which I was told Mr Popjoy would arrive, and preparing a severe attack upon his carelessness and stupidity in taking such a place without a thorough investigation of Mr Gasper's flowery statements.

About half-past eight, one of the children (my little girl) ran out of the door, and by the window, and shortly afterwards I saw Mr Popjoy coming over the gravel heaps, looking very tired, with a great carpet-bag in one hand, and a basket in the other. He put these

things down to kiss the child, who bounded towards him, delighted at his return; and, for some reason, at that moment I forgot all my indignation—the damp walls, the nailed-up parlour, the ponds, and the Banded Brothers of Freedom—and went to the door to give him a welcome, as our little child had done before me.

The bag and basket, as I expected, contained a curious mixture of food, all thrown together—meat, grocery, and fruit, with one or two toys, and some pastry-cooks' pies for the children. Those children who had gone to bed seemed to be aware of the arrival, and there was a commotion up in the loft (I cannot call it a bed-room), until the expected purchases were taken up and shown, with a promise that they should be punctually delivered in the morning.

I learned from my husband, by degrees, over the supper table, that the General Freehold Society of the Banded Brothers of Freedom had turned out to be nothing but a well-organized swindle, Mr Gasper, the leading rascal, having disappeared, and the offices in town (where Mr P. had called that very day to ascertain why the workmen were not completing our premises) being cleared of everything except a dusty fixture-desk, and a few shreds of paper thrown into the fire-place. My husband admitted he had made a great mistake; but he did not tell me he had drawn fifty pounds from his employers, by Mr Gasper's pressing request, the whole of which had been handed over to that crafty manager, with the idea of keeping the carpenters and bricklayers in motion. I did not find this out until some time afterwards, when he got very shabby in his dress, and I then discovered he was paying it off by degrees out of his savings.

The next day I went to town with Mr P., and finding the house we had left a few weeks before still vacant, I took a lease of it for one-and-twenty years. As we were moving away from the Freehold Land settlement, a few days afterwards, just as I had locked up the empty house, and was turning to follow the vans, I saw three gentlemen standing by Mr Popjoy, the eldest of whom, a fat, red-faced man, seemed to be the spokesman.

'My dear,' said my husband, as I came up, 'will you see to this? There appears to be a little difficulty.'

'We are here,' said the fat gentleman pompously, 'to demand possession of those premises.'

'Which,' I replied, 'I must respectfully decline to give, without compensation.'

'Compensation!' shouted the fat gentleman. 'Compensation! Are you aware that you are squatters?'

‘I am aware that my husband,’ I answered, ‘has sunk between one and two hundred pounds upon those premises, which I intend to have back before I give up the key.’

‘Very well,’ returned the stout gentleman, ‘very well; the whole thing—the whole place—is a swindling, squatting settlement, from beginning to end, and ought to have been nipped in the bud. Jones, serve notice of ejectment.’

My husband received from one of the other gentlemen a piece of paper, which we have carefully kept for many years. We still retain the property at the gravel-pits, which we visit for amusement now and then; and the memory of the fat, testy gentleman with the red face, has almost died away. Perhaps he has died away also, and his successors have lost my husband’s address.

NOBODY’S CHILD.



SOME of us are old enough to remember a hot, close, misty summer—called the cholera summer—in which people stood in knots at street corners, and men went reluctantly to work, fearful when they returned of finding death within their households. Sad as this time was, yet it had its bright side, for many hearts were drawn closely together; much love, charity, and kindness sprang up in stony barren places; many old hatreds were extinguished for ever, and many came out of the bitter trial wiser and better, because suffering, men.

In one of those smoky pent-up London streets, where everything is dirty and cheerless, at the open doorway of a house were seated two persons, a man and a child. The child was a girl of seven or eight summers—if summers ever come and go in such a place—pale and sad, but beautiful and graceful even in her dirt and rags. Her companion was a middle-aged, bronzed, dusty, grizzly man—a wandering pedlar; and though many might have thought him repulsive as he sat there smoking his short black pipe, the child looked upon him with other eyes.

Old Gipsy Jack, as he was called, was always a favourite with little Mary; now he had become something more—an adopted father. Little Mary’s father and mother both died of the pestilence, and Gipsy Jack, with his wife and infant boy, might have died too, like many

others, had they not been on the tramp in Surrey at the time. When they returned, they found the little orphan crouching in the dark and filthy passage of the low lodging-house, ragged, miserable, and hungry—nobody's child. Gipsy Jack could neither read nor write: as to understanding workhouses, institutions, and such things, that was far above his poor powers. Many virtuous persons looked upon Gipsy Jack as a thief, which he certainly was not; but he was very poor—had often known what it was to be hungry and miserable; and seeing a neighbour's child hungry and wretched, he knew of no other way of comforting it than of feeding it out of his own small store. Jack, with all his poverty, must indulge in the luxury of adopting a child; and little orphan Mary from that day became one of the old tramping pedlar's family.

Gipsy Jack had just returned from one of his solitary country rounds, and the child was happy, for she had watched for him for many days. He spoke to her of country lanes, of old farmhouses, of birds, of fields of waving corn, and forests thick with blackberries, and wild flowers—spoke to her in his rough rude tongue, but in no unkind way, and with his half-gipsy love of woods and fields, until her poor young weary yearning heart was full to overflowing, and her eyes were wet with tears.

'Let me go with you, Father Jack,' said the little orphan, 'let me go to those places you speak of, where those flowers come from that old Biddy here carries on her head. Will you, Father Jack? I can walk a long, long way without being tired.'

Father Jack did not want much entreaty to persuade him. He never took kindly to cities at the best of times, merely putting into them from necessity, to replenish his pack, and being always glad to get away again.

The melancholy look of the streets now alarmed him, and shook his faith more than ever in the healthiness of towns.

'So thee shall, lass,' said Father Jack, knocking the ashes out of his pipe; 'go in and tell t' old 'oman to pack up the kit; we'll all get out o' this cholery bus'ness to-morrow.'

The poor little orphan needed no second bidding. The dream of her young heart was about to be realized, she was going to see the country for the first time—was going to leave the black stifling town, that had been to her so dreary a prison-house. She knew nothing of the hardships and privations she would have to undergo: she was a child, and dark and wretched as her life had been, she was hopeful and trusting.

Away they went at daybreak, a group much like many others who had gone before them. First of all trudged Father Jack with his pack and stick, his back bent forward, not from weakness, but long habit; behind him followed Mother Jack, a strong, stout, good-humoured looking Irishwoman, with her baby in her arms, crowing at little orphan Mary, who trotted at her side, with her little earnest face peeping out from under a bonnet that covered her like a cloak, and with a dress that looked as if it had been hastily made out of an old coat of Father Jack's. A poorer family you could hardly meet with in a day's walk, nor a happier one either; for the same kindness of heart which led them to share their fare with little Mary, made them contented with whatever befell them.

And so they trudged on, day after day, up dusty lanes, across cool green meadows, by the side of rivers, on turnpike roads leading through simple villages and populous towns with busy market-places; down again into the quiet country, through arched forests, where the deer skipped across their path, and where the child often lingered behind to pluck the flowers. And when little Mary was tired, the pedlar took her on his back; and at night they rested, sometimes in farmhouse barns, and sometimes in cottage beds.

Sometimes they had a wet day, and then they stayed in a roadside alehouse, and little Mary watched through the dimmed glass, and saw the heavy showers sweeping over the hills, or played with her little foster-brother on the sanded floor. Sometimes, in their wanderings, they drew near the coast, and heard the moaning of the sea at night. They saw the grass become hay, and saw it cut and stacked; they saw the green corn ripen, and saw it gathered in; they saw the leaves falling, the days shorten into autumn, and the mists of winter creeping on.

'Isn't it always summer, Father Jack, in the country?' said little Mary, in a melancholy inquiring tone.

'Noa, lass, and we mun 'gin to look arter winter quarters,' returned the pedlar.

This answer made the child sad. She loved this roving country life, although her little legs were always very weary at night, and she feared now that they would return to the hard black city, whose hateful memory she had forgotten in the bright summer days. But Father Jack had no idea of going back to London. They were now in Dorsetshire, not far from Bridport; and, to the child's great delight, she heard the pedlar settling with an old farmer for a little sheep-hut on one of the hills, about four miles from the town of

Beaminster. This was to be their dwelling for the winter months—the pedlar intending to tramp in and out, on short journeys, with his wares. They took possession of their new habitation one November morning, and found it bleak and poor enough; but it was free and open, and they wished for nothing more. A large cupboard, filled with fresh hay, made a capital bed-room for little Mary; and it is doubtful whether she was not the most comfortably housed of the four. The pedlar started the next morning by himself to work round the villages, on his way to Southampton to replenish his stock. They stood on the edge of the moor, and watched him winding down the hill, and along the road, until his figure was lost among the trees.

Little orphan Mary played about the hills, in her large scarecrow bonnet and little jacket, with her foster-brother, who was just beginning to feel his legs. Many a fall and bruise they had, but they did not seem to mind them, and the exercise kept them warm on the frosty mornings, while Mother Jack went down into the town of Beaminster to buy their scanty provisions. Work of any kind was not to be had; capital was scarce, and the labour market overstocked; and full-grown men, in bones, but wasted in flesh, were begging to be employed at a few pence a day. They all predicted a hard winter, and loitered about in a loose listless way, doing nothing to soften it. The ratepayers began to complain, and the authorities at the work-house commenced barricading their stronghold against the expected siege of misery and pauperism.

Mother Jack and little Mary, however, were not idle. Hearing that a large mansion was being constructed some miles off, Mother Jack trudged over to beg a load of firewood, and meeting some of her countrymen there, she staggered back with as much as she could carry. Little Mary's duty was to hunt about the hedges for bramble sticks, and to gather dry brushwood wherever she could find it; and so well did she execute her task, with her little rough bleeding hands, that the old hut on the moor was never without a cheerful glow in the evening.

Thus they lived on contentedly enough for many weeks, until they began to wonder that Father Jack had not come back. He was a fortnight behind the time he had fixed for his return, and the small store that he had left, although they had husbanded it with great care, was now exhausted. One snowy, windy night, having had little food during the day, they had retired to rest earlier than usual, to sleep off the pangs of hunger; but, although Mother Jack and the infant were in a heavy slumber, little Mary could not close her eyes;

for, young as she was, she began to be conscious of a sense of dependence, and reproached herself with taking away from the scanty store of her foster mother and brother. She wished she could labour at some useful task, but she felt how weak and helpless she was, and wept. Poor little orphan outcast! she dreamed not how soon her young energies were to be tried, and her usefulness weighed in the scale with gaunt misery, and not found wanting! She was startled from her reflections by a rustling sound at the door, as if some one was rubbing against it, accompanied by low moans, as of a person in pain. Little Mary had nerves stronger than most children of her age, and although her young heart beat fearfully, she did not cry, but raised herself on her straw bed, and looked out of her cupboard anxiously at the door. She heard the click of the latch, and she saw the door slowly open, and, by the dim light which came in from the moor, she saw the stooping figure of a man standing in the doorway, and creeping slowly into the hut. She then heard a hoarse weak voice uttering the name of Norah—the Christian name of Mother Jack. A thought struck the child that it was Father Jack returned, and, unable to control her excitement any longer, and overcoming her fear, she started from her bed, and clung to his legs, crying his name aloud till the old hut echoed again. This aroused Mother Jack, and, dark as the place was—for they had no candle—she at once recognized her husband. But how changed from the stout cheerful pedlar who left the moor some two months back! Little Mary had kindled some of the brushwood in the grate, and by its flickering light they saw before them a poor, faint, sickly, broken-spirited man, whose wasted body shrank within his garments, and whose hollow cheeks and sunken eyes told a melancholy tale of fever and pain.

‘Let me tumble into bed, lass,’ he said, in a husky voice; ‘I be ill—very ill.’

They led him to the humble bed in the corner of the room, by the side of his sleeping child, and they sat up over the embers in the grate, waiting anxiously for the morning. The long night ended, and it came at last, and with it came the realization of their worst fears. They gathered from him, at intervals, that he had reached Southampton—that he had slept at some poor lodging-house, used by the more humble and reckless class of sailors—that he had taken some fever, had sickened, and become delirious—that all his little property was spent, lost, wasted, or stolen—that when he returned to consciousness, he dragged himself away, and begged his way towards the moor—that, after pain, privation, and long suffering, he had reached his poor

home, a broken, helpless, dying beggar. Yes, he was dying fast, and they had nothing to give him to comfort him. They were four miles from any help—and that help the union workhouse! There was but one course open; Mother Jack hastened down to the town of Beaminster, and applied for parish relief; and, after much anxious delay and cross-questioning, she got it—three coarse quartern loaves, and a bottle of physic, with a promise that the parish doctor, who had a very wide round, should look in some time in the course of the next day. When she got back, it was long after noon, and little Mary had acted in the mean time as a thoughtful little nurse. It mattered not, however, what they did, or what they brought—poor old Father Jack was beyond any earthly aid. He lingered on for some few hours, and died quietly, without a murmur or complaint, about the middle of the night. When little orphan Mary rose the next morning, a new trial awaited her; she found her foster-father lying dead, and her foster-mother stricken with the fever—sick, listless, and unable to rise.

For hours and days little Mary sat nursing the infant, and watching by the side of her foster-mother, and still no doctor came. Their lonely hut was out of the reach of any cottages, and away from the road, and it was rare in the winter-time for any one to pass near the place. Little Mary, with the desperate strength which hard necessity will give a child, dragged the poor stiff body of her dead foster-father to the back of the hut, and laid it down on the cold damp earth. How different was it now to that day in the black city, when he was strong and kind and loving, in his rough way, and she was lying, a poor neglected starving orphan, upon the lodging-house stairs!

Their bread was now exhausted, and the time had come round to go to the workhouse again; for they dispensed their charity there twice a week, on a Wednesday and a Saturday. Little Mary disposed of the infant as safely as she could, and kissing her foster-mother, who became weaker every day, she fastened the door of the hut behind her, and ran off across the moor. Guiding herself by the church, which she saw in the distance amongst the trees, she reached the town in about two hours; and, once there, she was not long in finding her way to the workhouse. She was too early by some time, and she had to stand outside the building, with many others, who were waiting for the same bitter charity. It was a very dull, cold, biting day, and the wind and sleet, eddying round the workhouse walls, cut into the very bones of the thinly clad paupers who were crouching on the door-steps. A very miserable-looking group they were: women with

children, children by themselves, old men, and lank agricultural labourers—hollow-eyed, heavy-looking men, staring into the dark future, and thinking of nothing but food, with their dirty yellow smock-frocks fluttering in the winter wind. At length the doors opened. Some were admitted into the house, others were sent back, there being no more room for in-door paupers. Some took their loaves with eagerness, and slunk off down the town; others received their portions in sullen silence. Little Mary's turn came last, because she was diffident, and stood back. She told them of her foster-father's death, and her mother's illness, both of which facts were carefully entered in a book, and, with a promise that 'it would be seen to,' she was started off home with two loaves instead of three, one being withheld because of the death of her father. And so she went trotting along the hard lanes, and across the bare fields, with one loaf under each arm, scrambling through rough hedges, and toiling up the bleak hills, with her little pale sad earnest face steadily set in one direction—that of the old hut upon the moor.

They sent and removed the body of her dead foster-father; and the parish doctor, an ill-paid, over-worked man, administered some common drugs for the relief of her mother; but they seemed to have little effect, probably from the want of other and more necessary comforts, and the patient lingered on. Meanwhile, in all weather, hail, rain, or snow, on the appointed days, and at the same hours, was little Mary seen speeding through the mist across the moor to the workhouse gate, and toiling back again with the hard coarse welcome loaves under her little arms. One afternoon, near dusk, she ventured to try a by-lane on her return, thinking to shorten her journey, and save a hill. She had not proceeded far, when she passed a low hovel on the roadside, at the door of which sat a haggard, grizzly labouring man, upon a three-legged stool, with his face resting moodily and savagely in his hands, and with his elbows on his knees. It did not want a second glance, knowing the state of the country, to tell that in that hut were misery, starvation, and death. The man saw her pass, and eyed her curiously. She hurried on. A thought seemed to strike him, and he rose and followed her. His design was soon evident—it was to rob her of the parish bread. She was near the end of the lane, at the corner of the high road; and dreading to return home without food, she clung tightly to the two wretched loaves, for she felt that they were her life, and the lives of those dear to her, who were anxiously awaiting her return. There was a time, perhaps, when this man was kind and thoughtful, and not the

brutal savage he appeared now ; but misery and famine had made him desperate.

‘Curse ’ee!’ he howled; ‘thee’d best gie ’em up or, by——’

Heaven forgive him! He struck her a wild fierce blow across the mouth with his heavy fist, and she rolled, bleeding and senseless, upon the ground. He had got his prize—his two loaves covered with dirt and blood, and he slunk back like a beast to his den.

The whole of that dreadful night the sick woman waited the return of her foster-child, and her infant cried for his little nurse and his daily bread, while little Mary lay stretched on the roadside, bruised, parched, stupefied, and weak from long fasting and loss of blood. When morning came in the hut upon the moor, the infant had ceased his wailing, and sunk to sleep across his mother; his mother had sunk to sleep as well—never to wake again in this world. If the cruel thought haunted her last moments, that little Mary had wearied of her helpless companions, and deserted them in their last need, that clear knowledge which comes only with death must have taught her how false were her doubts of her poor adopted child.

When morning came at the roadside where lay little Mary, an old lady and a serving-man were bending over her; and lifting her tenderly into a pony-chaise, they took her down into the town to a warm, neat, comfortable house, where they washed the blood and dirt from her poor little face, and having fed her with boiled milk, they put her to bed. Sending up to the hut upon the moor, they buried her foster-mother, and brought her little foster-brother back to life, and hope, and health.

Years afterwards, little orphan Mary had learned to read and write and sew, and had become a companion to the kind old lady, living in the town of Beaminster, in a brown gabled house, with an inscription on it let in on a crumbled stone—‘Anno Domini, 1648.’ The boy, too, who had been sent to a school of charity at Exeter, had become a chorister in its ancient cathedral; and when his holidays came round, he always spent them with little Mary; walking over the moor in the long summer evenings, or sitting with their benefactress round the fire in the winter twilight, chanting lowly, in his rich clear voice, that chant which the old lady loved:—

‘He hath exalted the humble and meek,
And the rich he hath sent empty away.’

PIANOFORTE LESSONS.



F all the false household gods, that are not gods, but demons—of all the hideous skeletons that mope and mow in corners of peaceful dwellings, there is nothing more detestable than a thoroughly bad and new piano. An instrument whose keys are heavy and clogged, and refuse to move under any but the most muscular grasp; whose wires are dumb for any harmonious utterances, and find speech only for a loose, short tinkling sound, that is thoughtful enough to die away as soon as produced; but whose outer shell, if not in accordance with the severest decorative taste, is highly polished and showy to the eye; is nothing but a musical, melancholy, delusive apple of the Dead Sea. The mechanism of such an instrument is worn and faded with age, while its case is so new that the damp of nature has hardly left the wood. Many thousands of such pianos are annually made in this country, and disposed of through an elaborate organization with tolerable success. They are always well advertised as bargains sold under peculiar circumstances, and purchasers are always ready to be caught by such a taking device. I have not always been so worldly-wise myself. It was only the other day that I bought an instrument in this way, which has since, I am happy to state, been turned into profitable use as a mustard-and-cress bed. The record of my experience may be a warning to those who have the same money and the same desire to buy a piano, and who are, at present, as innocent as I once was, but never hope to be again.

The first piano that I visited was described in the advertising columns of the leading daily journal as 'a sweet and elegant instrument, chaste in design, pliable in touch, with all the latest improvements; the property of a lady who was going to Sierra Leone.' The address was a lodging-house in a genteel decayed neighbourhood; and I was struck by the contrast between the brilliant face of the instrument and the faded appearance of the well-worn furniture in the room.

'You haven't had it long, ma'am?' I said, addressing the lady who was about to proceed to Sierra Leone.

'No, sir,' she replied, 'and there's the annoyance. If I'd known my medical man was going to order me to Sirry Leony for the

benefit of my health, I shouldn't have bought it, as I did, only two months ago.'

'That's rather a curious place to be ordered to for your health, ma'am,' I said; 'the most fatal spot for Europeans on the globe.'

'I leave it to my doctor,' she replied, promptly, who 'knows my constitution best. Shall I have the pleasure of sending the piano home at fifty pounds?'

'Thank you,' I replied, 'I have got my daughter to consult, but I will lose no time in letting you know.'

'There are two other persons after it,' she returned, as she showed me to the door; 'and if you could oblige me during the day?'

'Oh, certainly,' I said, 'you may consider it done.'

I did not decide to purchase this 'chaste and pliable instrument;' and I believe its nominal owner did not go to Sierra Leone, as I saw the same advertisement repeated, at intervals, for several months after this interview.

The next piano that I visited was one described in very similar terms, except that it was the property of a bereaved parent. Children will die, and pianos must be sold, and as public inspection was invited, I got over any natural delicacy that I might have felt in trespassing, as a stranger, upon the sacred domains of private grief.

The address was again a lodging-house in the same neighbourhood, with very similar furniture, and a very similar instrument—so similar, in fact, that it might have been the identical one I had gazed upon a few weeks before. A female servant attended me during the inspection.

'Missus,' said the girl, handing me a written paper, 'as put down the lowest she'll take, an' if you don't like that amount, p'raps, she ses, you'll make a offer.'

'Isn't your mistress at home, then?' I asked.

'Oh, yes,' replied the girl; 'but she never comes into this room, and never will until that pianny's moved out of it.'

'Indeed!' I observed.

'No, sir,' continued the girl, 'becos you see it belonged to Miss Mariar, who was the fav'rite child.'

'It looks very new,' I answered, 'as if the child hadn't used it much.'

'Lor' [bless you, sir!] returned the girl, 'Miss Mariar thought nothink of 'aving a new pianny ev'ry week, an' the men was always a-muckin' the stairs in bringing 'em in, or takin' 'em out.'

‘Is Miss Maria, as you call her, the child that’s dead?’ I asked.

‘Yes, sir,’ she answered, ‘I think she is.’

I at once took my leave, without any further remarks, and, as the door closed behind me, I fancied I heard a somewhat angry conversation between the girl and some other female voice (perhaps the invisible mistress’s) in the passage.

Unfavourable as were my impressions of the two last visits, I resolved to persevere in my search; and the next advertisement that attracted me was one in which an aged man, whose sands of life had nearly run out, announced his wish to provide a new home for his piano before his death.

‘You’ve kept it in excellent condition,’ I remarked to the venerable-looking owner, for it seemed to me as new and as showy as the other two I had taken the trouble to examine.

‘I have,’ he replied, ‘and I shouldn’t like to part with it to any man who wouldn’t treat it as well. It’s been a companion to me for many years, and I respect it.’

‘A very proper feeling,’ I remarked, ‘and I hesitate in offering to deprive you of such a companion.’

‘Not at all, sir,’ he answered quickly—‘not at all. With one foot in the grave, it’s not proper that I should stand with the other foot in a piano. I’ve no friends or relations—none whatever—the instrument’s yours for fifty pounds.’

‘I think,’ I said, ‘I must take time to consider before I decide.’

‘Why?’ he asked, sharply. ‘You’re a man of business: so am I.’

‘True,’ I answered; ‘but this is a transaction, like marriage, which a man seldom enters into more than once during a life.’

‘Pay me five-and-forty pounds,’ he said, ‘and the loss of the difference will fall upon the charity to which I shall give the money.’

‘I think I must decline the purchase altogether,’ I replied.

‘You’ve either been playing upon my feelings, sir,’ he said, with much energy, ‘or wasting my time.’

‘Neither,’ I replied.

‘Perhaps you are looking for a hurdy-gurdy?’ he asked, sarcastically.

‘Wrong again,’ I returned; ‘the fact is, I have seen this instrument before, at the house of a lady who ought, by this time, to be at Sierra Leone.’

A minute but particular mark on one of the keys had enabled me to satisfy myself about this discovery, which turned out to be right. As I took my leave of the pianoforte proprietor, whose sands of life—

according to the advertisement—had nearly run out, I noticed a slight change in the position of his wig, to say nothing about his altered tone and manner, which made him more youthful by thirty years.

My experience by this time ought to have satisfied me that little pecuniary benefit was to be derived from hunting for bargains out of the regular order of trade. Curiosity, however, led me on; and the little knowledge I had already gained produced a feeling of confidence in my wisdom and keenness, that gave an additional zest to the pursuit.

The next piano that I visited was the property of a widow lady in reduced circumstances, who was compelled to part with some of the luxuries that had adorned her once happy home. The address was still the same kind of front parlour in a house let out for lodgings, and the piano was still the same kind of gay, showy, got-up-looking instrument, refusing in its shiny coat of sticky, treacly varnish, to harmonize with the other threadbare and dusty trappings of the room. After a few minutes' delay, the lady made her appearance, dressed in an ordinary vulgar dress, and with nothing of the widow about her except a particularly large and frightful cap, which she had evidently put on in a hurry, to attend me in what she considered becoming costume.

'You'll excuse me, sir,' she said, with emotion, 'if I seem to hurry you, but you know how painful it must be to me to sell anything that belonged to him, when he's only been dead a month—a month come next Wednesday.'

'Indeed!' I said, with a voice of sympathy. 'Is it a six three-quarter octave?'

'No, sir,' she returned, with a deep sigh, 'he couldn't a-bear anything larger than a six-and-a-half. He never had strength to play upon it, though he gave eighty-five guineas for it a month before he died; and I suppose I mustn't ask any one more than sixty?'

'I thought it seemed very new,' I replied; 'unseasoned, if I may use the term.'

'No, sir,' she said, 'not unseasoned. New, if you like, but not unseasoned; he was too good a judge for that; and his last words almost were, "Mary Anne, if you let that instrument go for less than I gave for it, you'll do yourself an injury."'

I went direct from the widow's house, of course without having made a purchase, to look at the piano of a widower in reduced circumstances, which, my advertisement list told me, was for sale in the next

street. The instrument might have been the twin brother of the widow's piano, and the widower might have been the husband of the widow. The house was again a lodging-house; the apartment was again a faded front parlour; and the bereaved owner of the property was a middle-aged man, who had huddled on a shabby black coat over a blue shirt and a highly-fanciful waistcoat, which gave him the appearance of a professional cricketer, made hurriedly decent to attend a funeral.

'You'll pardon me, sir,' he said, in tones of deep feeling, 'if I appear to hasten your departure, but you know how trying it is to dispose of anything that belonged to her, when she's only been dead a fortnight—a fortnight next Saturday.'

'Indeed!' I replied, in the same tone I had used to the widow, for the speech was, in substance, the same. 'Is it a full seven octave!'

'No, sir,' he replied, with a heavy sigh, 'her fancy always ran upon six and three-quarters. It seems only yesterday that I gave eighty guineas for it, before she was taken from us, and now I suppose I mustn't expect to get more than sixty pounds in cash?'

'I'm afraid,' I answered, 'that it's too new—too unseasoned for me to venture on its purchase.'

'Too new, sir? too unseasoned?' he exclaimed, in astonishment; 'don't say that, because I know she was too good a judge to be imposed on. It was only a few days before she was taken from us that she said to me, "Robert, it was very kind of you to spend your mother's legacy in buying me a piano; but it'll be no loss to you. You'll get back all you gave for it, if you put it up to auction."'

Having had enough of this mixture of the grave and the huckster's shop, I passed, still pianoless, to a more cheerful atmosphere. A young man in chambers had advertised an instrument for sale, which he had unexpectedly won at a raffle; and though his direction was not very promising, I resolved to pay him a visit. The instrument, as I expected, presented the same old familiar face that I had gazed upon so often for the last few weeks, and I seemed to welcome it as a tried and valued friend.

The young man, who looked like one of those commercial travellers who leave Josephus in penny numbers at street-doors upon commission, affected an extremely off-hand, living-in-chambers manner in displaying his property.

'There you are,' he said, throwing up the lid; 'a piano's all very well, but it don't suit my book.'

‘You don’t play, then?’ I asked.

‘No time,’ he replied, ‘for all that sort o’ thing when you’re going in for the law.’

‘No,’ I said, ‘I suppose not. The instrument seems remarkably new.’

‘Does it?’ he returned. ‘I’m no judge. They tell me it’s worth eighty sovs., and I want fifty for it. That won’t break anybody’s back.’

‘No,’ I said; ‘but I don’t think it’s quite the thing to suit me.’

‘Say five-and-forty, then. It cost me nothing, and I want to buy a dog-cart.’

‘I think I must decline,’ I replied.

‘You don’t seem to know your own mind,’ he said.

‘I know the piano, though,’ I returned. ‘It belonged to one whose sands of life ought by this time to be thoroughly run out.’

The young man in chambers said no more, for he saw that I was an exceedingly well-informed man. The instrument was the same one, with the small mark on one of the keys, that I had examined at the house of the venerable-looking secret agent.

I did not give up the investigation even at this point, but passing from these channels of private enterprise to a more public field, I visited a piano that was on view at a hat-shop in a leading thoroughfare. It was still one of the same large family of instruments that was presented to my view, though the man who exhibited it was not made up to perform any particular character, except that of an affable tradesman.

‘Music’s a nice accomplishment, sir?’ he said, as I tried the keys with a very lame performance of the ‘Merry Swiss Boy,’ and variations.

‘Ye—s,’ I said, endeavouring to speak without interrupting the flow of harmony.

‘Wish I had your touch, sir,’ he continued. ‘You must have learnt very young.’

‘No,’ I said, affecting not to hear his last remarks, ‘this instrument’s not the one for my money.’

‘Of course not, sir; certainly not, sir,’ he returned quickly; ‘I thought so the moment I heard you run your fingers over the keys. There’s no deceiving you, you’re too good a judge of the article.’

‘Good morning,’ I said, preparing to go, though not displeased by his observations.

‘If you’ll step up-stairs, sir,’ he replied, confidentially, ‘I think I can suit you to a hair, though we don’t want it generally known that we sell pianos at a hat-shop.’

I went up-stairs under the guidance of a boy, who took me as far as the second landing, where I was introduced to a long room crammed full of every variety of instruments. The master followed in a few minutes, and seemed astonished that I was standing in the middle of his secret stock, instead of in another department, where he meant me to be ushered to inspect another solitary specimen.

‘Well, sir,’ he said with some little embarrassment, ‘since you’ve been shown in here by that stupid boy, I can say no more. You’re a man of the world, and must know that a hat-warehouse is not half full of pianos without a reason. They may be smuggled, or they may be—— However, we’ll say no more about it. Here they are. I hope, sir, you’ll take no notice of the singular circumstance.’

‘Oh, certainly,’ I replied, ‘it’s nothing to me.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ he returned, quickly, ‘much obliged, I’m sure; and since you are here, if there’s any instrument you’d like to select, you may place your hand on any one of them for fifty pounds.’

I own that I was weak enough to be deceived by the elaborate train of deception, and that I suffered accordingly. I selected an instrument for a fifty-pound note, which faded away in harmony and appearance before it had been in my possession six months, notwithstanding that it was treated in the most kind and considerate manner. I called in the services of a professional man to effect a cure, and he candidly told me that the operation was impossible. The piano had only one fault, but that was of the most unreformable kind—it was a bargain bought, in a moment of weakness, at a hat-shop.

A COUNTERFEIT PRESENTMENT.



Y name is not unknown to the British public. When I mention that I am the author of those powerful letters which appear occasionally under the signature of Hydrophobius, I need scarcely add that I am the celebrated Sweetwort. While writing those letters I was a happy man. My privacy was as strictly preserved as that of Junius, and probably for the same reason, because my name would then have added nothing to

the force of my fulminations. In a moment of weakness I allowed the veil to be torn asunder. My letters were collected and published; and, not content with that, to show my versatility, I gave to the world a collection of poetry, bearing my signature at full length, under the title of *The Rhododendron*, and other poems. For about three months after the publication of these two volumes, I had the exciting pleasure of seeing myself torn to pieces by my enemies in the daily and weekly critical organs; and the stupefying agony of seeing myself defended by my friends in the same channels of public instruction. The result of this contest was, that I became a literary lion. No gathering of wits was considered perfect without me. My time, during the week, was divided between dinner parties, evening parties, and conversazioni. Occasionally, as I passed along the streets, I had the satisfaction of seeing men who were walking together, turn round as I went by, and hearing them say to each other hastily: 'There he is! That's Sweetwort!—Hydrophobius, you know!'

I had lived in this happy state for about six months, when it was suddenly found by photographic artists that a public demand existed for my portrait. I might have anticipated this natural result of my exalted position, but I had purposely closed my eyes to it for certain reasons of a physical nature.

My face and head are of that peculiar character, that, under no possible combination of lights and attitude could they be agreeable in a photographic portrait, or give any correct idea of the original. This, however, availed nothing to stem the tide of persecution, which set in, gently at first, but gradually increased in power, until it broke down every barrier which the forms and decencies of society had raised before it.

The attack was commenced with letters, which came one and two a-day, three and four, ten, a dozen, even twenty at last, from photographic artists, soliciting the favour of a sitting. Some came with bare requests; others backed by the recommendations of acquaintances, to whom they were allowed to refer; others giving a list of what they had already done in the wide field of literary and artistic portraits. All these letters required to be answered according to the rules of business and politeness.

Not always, however, was the request conveyed in writing; frequently it gave rise to personal visits of gentlemanly-looking men, who, if I was not at home, would not leave their cards, saying it was no matter, and they would call again. Some, by great tact and

industry, obtained an interview, and were very difficult to bow out, they were so mild and persuasive. A few of the more energetic, when they called, were thoroughly prepared to take advantage, if I happened to be in one of my moments of weakness. Boys were waiting with the necessary apparatus round the corner; and sometimes the shadow of the abominable instrument was cast by the sunlight across my study blinds, as I was endeavouring with all the powers at my command to get rid of its owner. I was as much attacked by the implements of photographic art, as ever an unpopular Irish landlord was by the blunderbusses of insolvent tenants. My excited imagination saw the detestable lens pointed at me in the street, levelled at my dressing-room curtain as I went through the task of shaving; lurking for me in by-lanes, and under cover of the trees in the open meadows; stationed even in the very centre of the green-coated German band who played their operatic selection before my breakfast-room window.

The real or presumed ties of family and kindred were raked up to assist in my persecution.

A full-bearded gentleman of Venetian aspect waited upon me early one morning, with a letter from an agriculturist stationed in one of the most inaccessible parts of Wales, begging to introduce the bearer to my notice, he being the grandson of some old lady that I was supposed to remember, who was the niece of my mother's aunt by my mother's marriage with her first husband before she became the wife of my late father. I read the letter, and exhibited a decent degree of cordiality to my visitor. I even invited him to dinner, when, to my horror, he slowly explained, over the wine, the object of his visit—the old story—my portrait. But he did not get it. Oh no!

On another occasion, by the carelessness and ignorance of a new servant, a shabby sheriff's-officer-looking man was admitted into my study, where he immediately took a seat, placing a greasy hat upon the floor, containing a red cotton pocket-handkerchief. I awaited his pleasure, not being aware that any writs were out against me, or that a distress was likely to be put in for rent. He was not long in explaining his business.

‘Of course,’ he began, ‘as I says to my gov’ner, a gent didn’t ought to have his val’able time took up without gettin’ suffin for it.’

‘Sir!’ I said, in astonishment.

‘Well,’ he continued drowsily, without noticing my remark, ‘a gent’s pictur’ fetches money—consekently it’s worth money—that’s about the size of it, I think!’

I gave him no reply, being too much engaged in thinking of the uncharitableness of the world, which was probably attributing my coyness to interested motives. The photographic professors perhaps thought that the proper price for my portrait had not yet been offered to me, and had sent this agreeable agent to negotiate the purchase.

‘Come,’ he added, in what was intended to be a wheedling tone, ‘it’s soon over, you know; only like havin’ a tooth out, after all. If a gen’elman’s a gen’elman, my gov’ner ’ll do the thing that’s right.’

Whether this man was simply drunk—a paid agent, or a self-constituted agent, I did not stay to ascertain. At the close of the last speech I had him moved bodily out of the house, and I was annoyed with no more personal applications for the space of three weeks.

For the short period of three weeks I was entirely undisturbed, and began to comfort myself with the delightful belief that the portrait mania, as far as I was concerned, had at length worked itself out by sheer exhaustion, and died quietly away. I was the victim of a miserable self-deception. The calm was only the forerunner of the tempest.

Entering my study, one morning, a little earlier than usual, I found it, to my astonishment, in the possession of a tall, stout, determined-looking man, who returned my inquiring glance with a steady eye, that seemed prepared for everything. A mysterious feeling came over me, as I gazed with a kind of fascination upon the stranger, that at last I had found my master. He had obtained admission, in defiance of my strict instructions, by stepping over the pail and the housemaid, as she was cleaning the steps in the morning. Remonstrance, with such a man, I seemed to feel was useless, and I allowed him to state his business at once, without interruption, conscious that no time would be lost.

‘Now, sir,’ he said loudly, in the tone of a policeman who had just caught a notorious criminal, ‘you are aware that for some time a growing demand has existed for your portrait?’

I assented, silently.

‘You are aware,’ he continued, calmly, but forcibly, ‘that, when a demand reaches a certain height, it must be supplied?’

I again assented with a feeble nod.

‘Good. Look here.’

He drew a picture from his capacious coat-pocket. He placed it in my hand. I examined it carefully. It was a marvellous production of photographic skill—a beetle-browed man, with the Sunday complexion of a master chimney-sweep, the lineaments of a church-

warden mixed with those of the professional burglar, but whether the churchwarden turned burglar or the burglar turned churchwarden, it was impossible to determine.

‘Know that person?’ asked my visitor.

I replied that I did not.

‘Bill Tippetts—the Lambeth Phenomenon.’

‘Of the prize-ring?’

‘Of the prize-ring.’

I returned the portrait of Bill Tippetts.

‘Now,’ continued my visitor, ‘I’m a practical man. I’ve got an order for two thousand copies of your portrait, for home consumption, and fifteen hundred for exportation. I don’t want to do anything offensive; but, knowing your objection to sit for a photograph, I have been compelled to look amongst my stock for something like you, and I can find nothing so near the mark as Bill Tippetts.’

A cold perspiration came over me: the practical man had got me in his power.

‘This order for two thousand copies of your likeness for home consumption, and fifteen hundred for exportation,’ he resumed, ‘must be executed within ten days, and I can only give you till ten o’clock to-morrow morning to decide. At that hour I must know whether it is to be Bill Tippetts, or Mr Edgar Sweetwort. Good morning.’

Long before the appointed hour, I was sitting helplessly, under a broiling sun, in a glass cage upon the tiles of an elevated house near the Haymarket, W., composing my countenance according to the imperious instructions of the relentless photographer.

THE INNOCENT HOLDER.



MY father was a baker, not far from Bow Church—at least so the world believed—though a good many more watches and jewels came into our bakehouse than sacks of flour. The general public could never understand why our bread was so much dearer than any other baker’s, nor why we were so independent in our mode of transacting business. If the general public had seen the inside of some of the pies which were brought into our shop on the pretence of being baked, the general public would have been a good deal wiser.

My father was, in fact, a receiver of stolen goods; and a thriving,

because a prudent and accomplished man, at his business. He kept good faith with his customers, and they, in return, were faithful to him. What he said he would pay, he paid; and what he received in the middle of watch and jewel pies, he settled for, as the money was wanted, in the middle of golden-penny-loaves, and silver-half-quarters. The only mistake he made was that of sticking too close to his occupation! The result was, that he died suddenly one night.

My mother (she was only my stepmother) took care of herself, and swept up the whole of my father's property. When I returned from the funeral, I found the place in the possession of strangers, and that my mother had quietly left her mourning coach for a hackney-cab, at an early part of the return journey. I never saw her again; and when I heard, some years afterwards, that she had repented of the errors of her youth, and had devoted all my father's wealth (for he died very rich) to building a chapel, and endowing a clergyman to serve in it, I took the liberty of doubting the correctness of the story.

I was thus suddenly thrown upon the world at the age of nineteen, with no capital to speak of, and compelled to seek my living. Regular employment, with its small, certain gains, and its irksome confinement, was decidedly unsuited to my taste and habits, and I had been brought up in too good a school to rush headlong into any criminal enterprise that involved much labour and risk. I was too young to start in opposition to the new occupants of my late father's premises, although I might have commanded the whole of that excellent criminal connection; so I went forth to learn wisdom, and to seek my fortune.

After several years, many rebuffs, and some privations, I found myself the marker at a noted West-end billiard-room. Our house was a very late house, where the young gentlemen, and sometimes the old gentlemen, played very high at pool, and I thus became acquainted with the names, the manners, the wants, and the habits of the minor aristocracy. My City education had given me much information upon loans, loan-offices, discounting, and bills of exchange; and, while I acquired a certain mechanical dexterity in handling the cue, my mind was devoted to far higher things.

One evening towards dusk, when the afternoon play in the public-room had ceased, and before the evening play had begun, old Major Fobbs entered into very amicable conversation with me, as he was lazily practising some difficult cushion cannons.

'Pendragon,' he said, 'are you any relation to the late governor of the Bank of England?'

‘Not that I am aware of,’ I replied, thinking that the major was amusing himself at my expense.

‘It’s the same name, exactly,’ he answered, making a double hazard.

‘Indeed,’ I said, with affected apathy, waiting to hear further.

‘Has it never struck you, Pendragon,’ he continued, ‘that, with that name, you might do much better for yourself than sticking here?’

‘I should be glad to better my position,’ I said, meekly, ‘though I do not exactly see how.’

‘Then I can show you,’ he returned, throwing down the cue, and speaking confidentially; ‘become a director of a public company!’

This remark at once opened my eyes to a new field of enterprise; and a little further conversation with the major enlightened me still more. He was about to open an office—or, as he described it, to get up an association—to be called ‘The Peace and Concord Loan and Discount Company;’ and he wanted, as he phrased it, to strengthen his Board. I knew something, before this, of the major’s mode of life. The major had a small half-pay, as a retired member of some Indian military service, and he now traded on his position as a director of public companies. He belonged to the Chutnee Club, which gave him an aristocratic address that looked well in prospectuses. He was a director of two assurance companies, and the chairman of a trading company for providing the public with something they did not want, at a price rather higher than that of the regular tradespeople. These occupations procured him fees for each sitting (and the boards took care to sit pretty frequently), and he filled up his time and his income by playing at pool with unfledged youths about town at our public and private billiard tables.

At the time when Major Fobbs first spoke to me, the trading company had nearly sat out the whole of its subscribed capital; one assurance office was already undergoing the pleasing process of winding-up under the Acts for that purpose made and provided; and the other office—so rumour said—was waiting anxiously to be served with the legal notice of dissolution.

I knew all these things concerning the major, and yet I listened to his proposals; for they promised to enlarge my experience of the world, and to afford me an agreeable change of employment. In a few days I was transformed into Stanley Pendragon, Esquire, of Aurora Chambers, Mayfair, and Marsh Mallows Hall, near Fenny-Yokel, Lincolnshire. The first of these places was a metropolitan attic, the second a rural barn; and as they both belonged to the

major, all letters, messages, and inquiries were properly received, and properly and carefully answered.

The Peace and Concord Loan and Discount Office was speedily opened, and fully advertised. There were only two directors beside myself, the major and a gentleman from the Stock Exchange, or rather from the immediate neighbourhood. His name was Owen Griffiths, and he was described as belonging to the Cwmgwyrddyr Slate Quarries, near Gwrcmw Vale, Caernarvon.

We made no bad debts, for we neither lent money upon personal security nor did we discount bills, and we existed entirely upon the inquiry fees which we extracted from the applicants. We charged ten shillings a mile (paid in advance) for investigating the character of the borrower and his referee, and we were so fastidious in our choice (as our terms were unusually easy and our rate of interest very low), that we could never find any one worthy of being entrusted with a portion of our capital. When we told the expectants, after the expiration of the third day, that our information was satisfactory, but not sufficiently so, and for several reasons we must decline to make the loan, we were, in some cases, loaded with strong epithets, which we received calmly, because we knew they were undeserved.

After the first year, notwithstanding constant and judicious advertising, our business began to show palpable symptoms of dry-rot, and we began to look for some other employment suitable to our talents and our energies. The major becoming involved in some troublesome Chancery proceedings connected with his former companies (in which he had been indiscreet enough to accept shares), transferred all his interest in Aurora Chambers, Mayfair, and Marsh Mallows Hall, to me, and his eminent financial ability to the region of the Himalayas.

I had amassed, I can scarcely tell how, the substantial sum of eight hundred pounds. I was quite a capitalist, and I behaved like one. I opened a banking account with the old and respectable house of Croupy, Dross, and Croupy, and I prepared to commence a business on my own account, that had hitherto been very rudely organized—if organized at all—the business of An Innocent Holder.

Owen Griffiths, of the Slate Quarry, had not been so fortunate as myself in his position as Director of the Peace and Concord Loan Office. In the first place, he had not received so large a share of the gains; in the second, he was not of a prudent and economical turn of mind; and, just as I was about to propose to him some mutual arrangement, he saved me a world of trouble by begging me to devise

a scheme that would keep him from going back to Capel Court, and give him congenial employment. After some little apparent hesitation, I developed my plans, and he fell into them with enthusiastic eagerness. A third person was wanted to complete the secret association, and this person Owen Griffiths immediately provided. His name was Affy Davit, a professional witness, who had lingered about the courts of law for many years, attesting deeds, proving alibis, and swearing to identities, births, deaths, and marriages, in a prompt and unwavering manner. His gains had been precarious, his habits had been loose, and his indulgence had been gin, and was so still, whenever he could get it. By degrees his reputation for nerve to stand a cross-examination faded away, and he found himself passed by for newer and, as it was supposed, more reliable men. In this condition he was sent to me, and I approved of Owen Griffith's choice. His idea of payment was humble, while his powers of impersonation and disguise still remained; and in the event of his ever proving unfaithful, his testimony was too notoriously valueless to be feared.

In a few days Affy was established, under the name of Mr Barking, in a small but comfortable office, on the borders of the City, as a gentleman of some capital, who discounted bills; while Mr Owen Griffiths, acting under my directions, moved about in billiard-rooms and other fashionable circles, in search of young gentlemen and others who had expectations, and wanted bills done. From that hour I held no visible communication with these two men, but lived in such a manner that my respectability increased day by day, while all my payments, large or small, being made through such old established bankers as Messrs Croupy and Company, helped to foster the delusion of my being a good member of society. I was the Innocent Holder, and I did nothing that might destroy the belief in my innocence. Owen Griffiths was the agent, Affy Davit was the discounteer, and I was the person who finally held the bill for which I had given full and valuable consideration. When the young gentleman of full age was found—a very easy task—who wished to anticipate his property by a loan, a bill negotiation was suggested; and if no companion could be found silly enough to join his friend and write his name across a stamp, Owen Griffiths volunteered to draw and indorse the document for a handsome ready-money present. When the bill was properly manufactured it was taken to Mr Barking to be turned into cash, and that cautious gentleman always required it to be left with him for at least two days that he might make inquiry about the stability of the drawer and the acceptor. Much against Mr Griffith's wish,

but with the full consent of the young gentleman, this was done, and no more was ever heard of the transaction until Mr Barking had, in a few hours, changed his name, his office, and his wig, and I was in quiet and legal possession of the stamped document. When it arrived at maturity in the course of one month or two, as the case might be, I took steps to recover my property as an Innocent Holder. So careful were Mr Griffiths and Mr Barking (who sometimes changed places as discounter and agent) in selecting their dupes, that the amounts were always considerable and tolerably secure, and the position of the men such that they could not defend any action for fear of an exposure. A crafty advertisement in a clerical journal procured a plentiful batch of curates and rectors, who dared not brave a trial when they found they had been deceived, and who made the best terms they could with me rather than risk their gowns, their characters, and their livings. Expectants, on the other hand, were equally tongue-tied, for fear that in contesting the payment of a thousand or fifteen hundred pounds, they might lay bare their lives, their hopes, and their associates, and lose, in the process, a sum of fifty times the value. Nor would their obstinacy have defeated me, for my measures were too carefully prepared. There might have been abundant suspicion as to my moral claim to the bill, but I was its possessor; there would have been no proof that I obtained it without giving full consideration, while my cheque-books (arranged by myself) would have testified in my favour, and the jury would have been directed by the judge to pronounce me an Innocent Holder. I was not harsh—not unreasonable to my unfortunate debtors. I was always to be spoken to; and many a time I have taken something considerably less than the law entitled me to demand.

My banker's balance rapidly increased, and with it my outward respectability and my motive force. I was scarcely forty years of age, but I was beginning to get pursy and to feel warm. There is no saying how long I might have remained in the business of an Innocent Holder, if it had not been for the notorious case of Pendragon and Fitzhobbledehoy. This sprang out of a stroke of genius—clever, but dangerous—on the part of the unscrupulous Owen Griffiths and Affy Davit, Esquire, alias Mr Barking, and many other names too numerous to specify.

The Honourable Algernon Fitzhobbledehoy was a young man about town of very expensive habits, with considerable property in possession, and more considerable property in expectation. He was a long person, full six feet in height; long in the legs, which inclined in-

wards a little at the knees; long and crane-like in the neck; with a long nose, a long upper jaw, and a low retreating forehead. He had gone the regular round of education—private tutor, university, and so forth; but it had not added much strength to a naturally weak intellect. He had gone the regular round of idleness and dissipation; and experience seemed to have left him younger and more gushing than ever. His heart was soft, impressionable, and sentimental; and he fell desperately in love with a ballet-dancer. She was ten years his senior, saw her advantage; and in a few weeks, but for an unlucky volume of poetry, the Honourable Algernon Fitzhobbledehoy would have been a married man.

Mademoiselle Celestina Pomade, as she styled herself, had been to Paris, where she had acquired a French accent, and a foreign fascination of manner; but her birthplace was Ludlow, her name was Griffiths, and she was a niece to Owen Griffiths, my faithful ally. Amongst other presents which the enamoured Algernon had given his Celestina was a volume of miscellaneous verses, on the clear, white fly-leaf of which he had written ‘to my beloved Celestina Pomade, from her ever affectionate and devoted Algernon Fitzhobbledehoy.’ The signature was bold, rather below the other writing, and full across the centre of the sheet.

Owen Griffiths called upon his niece one morning at her lodgings, and was shown into a handsomely-furnished sitting-room, where he was left for some time; as the young lady had not yet come down from her chamber. To amuse himself, he took up some of the books upon the table, and amongst the rest the volume of poetry, when his eye soon rested upon the signature of the young man about town. Knowing the writer, and having no scruples of conscience, he conveyed the book to the broad pocket of his coat, and took his leave at the earliest possible moment after his unsuspecting relative thought proper to make her appearance. In a very short time the valuable counsels of Affy Davit were called in, and with a chemical preparation which that useful friend and companion had often used in his younger days, the words of affection on the leaf of the book were obliterated, for ever, without a mark, and nothing left but the bold signature of Algernon Fitzhobbledehoy across the blank page. The paper was torn out, cut, trimmed, filled up in the form of a bill of exchange for two thousand five hundred pounds, payable one month after date (the date being thrown back eighteen days), and then both Owen Griffiths and Billy Affy Davit, thoroughly disguised, went boldly before the Stamp Commissioners at Somerset House, told their story, paid the ten

pounds penalty, and the cost of the stamp, and in one of those many moments of official indolence, just before the termination of office hours, they got their instrument made legally complete.

Of course I knew nothing of these proceedings until some time afterwards, and of course the bill came regularly to me. At the expiration of the short time the bill had to run I made application to the astonished Algernon Fitzhobbledehoy for payment, and the unexpected demand almost deprived him of the little wit he ever had at command. He was, without exception, the weakest man I ever had to deal with; but your very weak men are not the best subjects for an Innocent Holder's trade. They want too much propping up, they consult too many friends and legal advisers, and the result is that they go to law, when your stronger debtor or victim arranges for himself.

This was the case with the Honourable Algernon Fitzhobbledehoy, and hence the celebrated civil cause wherein I was the plaintiff and he was the defendant. Of course I gained the day—the Innocent Holder always does and must—though the jury winced a little when told by the judge what form their decision must take. The Honourable Algernon could not deny his handwriting. I obtained an order for principal, costs, and interest, and the impartial justice of the law was vindicated. The case was so notorious at the time, that I retired, at once, from business, and the Honourable Algernon Fitzhobbledehoy, though he retired from the court under the strong impression that he was a deeply injured man, had had full value for his money, in my belief, in being saved (as he was) from a weak and imprudent marriage.

Though I am no longer an Innocent Holder, there are plenty of my trade left, and men of the Affy Davit and Owen Griffiths class have not to go far in search of a receiver. Many men, whose early days were brighter than mine, are found with capital to buy acceptances, asking no questions from the seller as long as the article is cheap. With something of the pride of an old conjurer exposing his tricks, I record my plans and operations, in the hope of again warning those who have been often warned before to little purpose. If people will shut their eyes and close their ears they must not complain if they fall, for the law reformer has no power to help them, and they can only save themselves.

AN EARLY-CLOSING PROBLEM.

IT is a broad line—a very broad line indeed—that divides my barber from all my other tradesmen. I never see my butcher in any other form than that of a greasy-headed boy; my baker may have gone to Australia on a speculative trip, or may have made a private and fraudulent transfer of his business; and my grocer may be—and is, I believe—a gentleman who buys pictures, and rides in his carriage. My tea and coffee come and go; my bread is light, and with not more than the usual allowance of alum; my meat is fresh; and I neither know nor care who provides these things, so long as they are fairly and punctually provided.

With far different eyes, however, do I look upon my barber. He is my barber, in the strictest sense of the term, by virtue of a confidence that has been years in growing to its present delightful maturity. No other barber is genuine. Not only has long habit made him familiar to me as a barber, and allowed me to place my face and throat in his hands without a misgiving, while he performs any up-strokes he thinks necessary with a sharp and glistening razor, but it has brought me into communion with him as a man and a friend—a friend with whom I have more unfettered, unreserved conversation in the course of a week, than with any one else, except my bosom intimates, in the course of a twelvemonth.

My barber is not an ‘artist,’ and his shop is neither a ‘saloon’ nor a bazaar. His business is small, and it is the interest of his customers to keep it so. We wish him every prosperity, up to the point where he still will have no occasion to engage a deputy—but not beyond it. No man, for instance, would grieve more than myself, if I went, any morning, into his humble receiving-room, and found him quite unable to attend upon me in person, in consequence of the crowd of customers who were there before me. Few people care to be made the blocks upon which the crude apprentice or the unskilful workman is allowed to practise. It is one of the hidden mysteries of the barber’s trade as to where the men are obtained who are willing to be mangled for a consideration, and where they retire to between their disfigurement and their restoration.

Our neighbourhood is not calculated to produce any overwhelming

amount of business for my barber, even under any possible condition of its future development. It is not a village, and yet it is a village; it is not the metropolis, and yet it is the metropolis. We join hands with the great centre of English civilization, through a long succession of semi-detached villas; we hear the hum of its restless traffic through the day; we see its dotted golden lamps, like spangles, coming through the mist at night, and the black dome of its huge cathedral standing like an inverted goblet in the air.

My barber's shop was in existence before our suburb had connected itself with the metropolis, and my barber has taken no pains to alter its original features. A few flabby powder-puffs, a small pyramid of pomatum boxes, and a glass jar half full of tooth-brushes, constitute his chief window stock in trade. Inside the shop we cannot boast of any luxurious fittings. A circular looking-glass, the faded cast-away of some ancient drawing-room; a common washhand-stand, on which is placed the black and cinder-crusted shaving-pot; a deal table, on which is a bruised block that always bears the false 'front' of some old lady in the neighbourhood, or the equally false 'back hair' of some young one who is treading early in the path of deception; a common shelf, on which is a pile of old greasy black-handled razors; a few Windsor chairs; a newspaper, quite a week old; a long coarse jack-towel for the common customers, and a few finer hand-towels for the aristocracy,—form the principal furniture of this humble establishment. The operating-seat, as we jocularly call it, is an old horse-hair arm-chair that has been patched and mended a hundred times. It is provided with a kind of crutch that is fastened at the back, the cross handle of which, well covered with leather, is made to fit into the hollow of each customer's neck, and support him in one position, as in a photographer's vice.

My barber, personally, is a little timid man, who is afraid to leave his doorstep for a moment (except on Sunday), for fear he should disappoint a customer. He is a widower with two children, a boy and a girl. The girl keeps his little household clean and tidy; but the boy is disorderly, fond of the streets, and will not be broken in to the business. I never go out for a walk, but I think of my barber's close confinement. From eight o'clock in the morning, when he opens his shop, until eleven o'clock at night, when he closes it, he is constantly at his post, and he has had no holiday, on a working-day, to my knowledge, except one, for nearly fifteen years.

This one holiday originated with me, and I have good reason to remember it.

‘Jones,’ I said, one day, to a neighbour with whom I am tolerably intimate, ‘I think poor Peebles, our barber, ought to have a holiday. He’s nine-and-forty years of age, and it’s high time that he saw the British Museum.’

‘Hasn’t he ever seen that institution of our country?’ asked Jones, in astonishment.

‘Never,’ I replied; ‘nor yet a variety of other places, except from the outside. He never gets out except on Sunday.’

‘Ha! true,’ returned Jones; ‘I never thought of that; and when he speaks about them, then, he’s only talking from hearsay?’

‘Exactly.’

‘Dear me, how singular! But how do you propose to relieve him?’

‘By engaging a deputy. A few of us can subscribe the money to pay for this, and all other incidental expenses; and if we tell him, firmly and authoritatively, that he must go out for a day, he’ll not venture to disobey us.’

A little further conversation with Mr Jones and a few other gentlemen, customers of barber Peebles, soon settled the matter. A small sum of money was easily collected, and the man who had never seen the British Museum, and a variety of other places, was told one morning that a holiday had been prepared for him.

‘Oh, thank you, gentlemen, much obliged, I’m sure,’ said the little barber, nervously; ‘but—but—oh, dear me! yes, I should like it very much, but it can’t be done, any way; it can’t be done.’

‘Oh, yes, it can, Peebles,’ we said.

‘Excuse me, gentlemen,’ he replied, timidly, ‘excuse me; there’s Mr Stubble at the Grove, who never gets up till twelve o’clock in the day, and who wouldn’t let any one shave him, except me, for fifty pounds; there’s Mr Dodo, the contractor——’

‘Peebles,’ we said, firmly, ‘we’ve arranged all this. You’ve been tantalized long enough by exhibiting bills referring to other people’s excursions—High Hill Ferry, Hampton Court and back for three-and-sixpence, United Odd Fellows to Southend, and such-like diversions; and now it’s your turn to have a day out.’

‘I’m much obliged to you for your kindness,’ he said; ‘but it’ll only unsettle me; it will, indeed.’

‘Peebles,’ we said, conclusively, ‘we’ll hear no more: you shall start next Wednesday.’

‘The day we had fixed for little Peebles’s holiday turned out to be remarkably fine, and the deputy we had hired for him, through a certain hair-merchant, turned out to be remarkably punctual.’

The great difficulty was in getting little Peebles off. We had fortunately booked a place for him by the first omnibus to town, or I doubt very much whether, with all our weight of authority, we should ever have prevailed upon him to start. He was only going to be absent about twelve hours, and yet he left instructions enough with his two children to last a year. He looked very suspiciously at the man who was to take his place, and seemed to dread delivering up his flock to be sheared by the possibly incompetent stranger. There was little time left for doubt and hesitation. The omnibus driver, according to our directions, called for him at eight o'clock in the morning, at the shop door; and he was trotting away before he knew exactly where he was, looking wistfully backwards, instead of hopefully forwards, until the vehicle was out of sight.

The man we had engaged to take his place was stout and red-faced; offhand in manner, and evidently fully impressed with a sense of his own skill. He knew he was only retained for a day, and he seemed to wish that every one should observe, within that short time, how vastly superior he was to the inferior Peebles, with whom the neighbourhood seemed so blindly satisfied. His style of sharpening razors had a touch of the juggler about it. He tossed the brushes about, as if, although clean, they were not ornamental enough to please him. He shrugged his shoulders at the jack-towel, whistled when he observed the looking-glass, and was quietly heard to say, with the intention of being overheard, 'No heintment of the Druids! an' he calls himself a 'air-dresser.'

I observed all this during the morning, while I was reading, or supposed to be reading, a newspaper; and towards midday I left him to himself, while I went to take my usual walk and my gossip at the reading-room of our literary institution. Much of little Peebles's business had been put off, by arrangement with the principal customers, and the run of shaving never took place until the latter part of the afternoon.

It was considered at the reading-room that, in order to encourage little Peebles when he came home, and pave the way for his taking a future holiday, we ought to exhibit sufficient confidence in the deputy we had provided, to allow him to shave us. Several of us who were in the habit of dining out, and who were rather particular about our personal appearance, really required shaving, and were totally unable to perform that very necessary operation upon ourselves.

Benjamin Franklin would have pitied us: for, from long depend-

ence upon another, we had lost the use of our shaving hands. Others, who were not so particular about having a clean smooth face, could have waited very well until the next morning; but it was generally agreed that it was advisable to allow the barber's deputy to act in every way as if he was little Peebles himself.

Towards five o'clock in the afternoon, I went over once more to the barber's shop, and found it in the possession of little Peebles's two children. The boy, aged eight years, who could never be persuaded by his father to take a pair of shears in his hands for any useful purpose, was busily occupied in cutting his sister's hair, according to some highly fanciful pattern. He had persuaded the girl, who was a year younger than himself, to sit patiently, under a promise that she should cut his hair in return. When I inquired after little Peebles's deputy, the children told me he had just stepped out, neither of them knew exactly where, but the boy rather thought to an adjoining public-house, from which he offered to fetch him.

He was fetched, of course. It was full ten minutes before he came; and when he entered the shop, his face looked very flushed, his eyes very sleepy, and he smelt very strongly of tobacco.

'At this moment a strange gentleman came in, and took a seat.

'Shave?' asked the deputy, thickly, addressing me.

'I'm in no hurry,' I said, not altogether unselfishly, reserving the reproof I was about to administer to him for his neglect in leaving the premises.

'Right,' he replied, slapping an open razor wildly, as he supposed upon his hand, but really upon the cuff of his greasy coat. 'I can polish orf forty gents while old Peebles ish a-lookin' at one.'

I was afraid, from his manner, that he was intoxicated; and while I affected to be deeply engaged with a newspaper, I watched him attentively.

'Any party can shave,' he shouted, as he mixed a lather in a way that shook the whole shop; 'any party can shave—man; but let 'em cut's 'air.'

'I'm not in a hurry,' said the stranger, mildly, after wincing under the deputy's very vigorous application of the soap-brush.

'P'raps not, shir,' said the deputy, slowly, as if giving utterance to a very smart remark; 'but y'see I am.'

The stranger opened his eyes very widely on hearing this speech, and I moved about rather uneasily on my chair.

'Call shop a 'air-dresser's?' continued the deputy, contemptuously, half closing his right eye, wrinkling up his nose, and partly putting

out his tongue, while he covered the stranger's face with lather; 'no washes—no shampoo mix'ure—no bucket de mill-flour—no nothink—bah!'

As he delivered the latter part of this speech, he backed towards a can of hot water, which was standing on a chair, keeping his sleepy eyes fixed upon me, for the purpose, I suppose, of impressing me with what he was saying. Dipping the open razor several times, without looking, down the outside of this can, under the impression that he had given it the benefit of the water, he was returning unsteadily to complete the shaving of the unsuspecting stranger, when I could remain passive no longer.

'You're drunk,' I said, starting up, 'and I insist upon your leaving this place immediately.'

He was preparing a reply, when he was interrupted by the entrance of a middle-aged gentleman, who brought in a child—a little boy—whose head was cropped as closely and unevenly as if it had been under the hands of a prison barber.

'Where is Mr Peebles?' asked the middle-aged gentleman hastily.

'He's not within at present,' I replied, taking upon myself the office of spokesman, while the stranger was hastily rubbing the lather off his face with the jack-towel.

'I beg yer pardon,' said the drunken deputy, pushing himself forward, 'I beg yer pardon; Peeblish is not in, but *I* am.'

'I sent my child over here,' continued the middle-aged gentleman, rapidly working himself into a passion, 'to have his hair cut. Look at it! I don't know Mr Peebles—I don't know the neighbourhood—I've only moved into it within the last twelve hours; and this is the treatment I received through my only child.'

'Shir,' said the deputy, with an air of offended dignity, 'you shent your boy over to common barbersh, an' you don't understan' a hartist's treatment.'

The discussion, which now threatened to assume a serious aspect, was broken up in its beginning by the drunken deputy staggering out of the shop, and up the road towards London. I endeavoured to pacify the middle-aged gentleman, with some success, and I was aided materially by several of my neighbours, who came in, according to promise, to show their confidence in our barber's deputy.

We tried to keep this mishap, and several others which came to our knowledge, from little Peebles, but, of course, we failed. He thanked us all round for his holiday, but never showed any desire to

take another. He still hangs up excursion bills of various kinds ; and sometimes he talks vaguely of retiring at a distant period. I am afraid there is little prospect of such an occurrence. It is the fate of most men to die in harness, as it is called. That fate, I feel certain, will also be my barber's.

NAVY DRY-ROT.

HE moment Sir Leicester Shorthorn, M.P., was persuaded to join the ministry, by being created First Lord of the Admiralty, the little town of Ramborough, which he represented in Parliament, was almost intoxicated with delight. It had been long felt amongst the local politicians that every department of the country had been gradually going to the bad. But the navy ! O dear, that was going to the dogs uncommonly fast ! Ramborough had a canal, which communicated with a river that ran thirty miles, and then dropped quietly into the sea ; and, once or twice during the year, a few small but respectable craft came up this river, and along this canal, for cargoes of hay. Therefore, if the people of Ramborough did not know something about naval affairs, who did ?

Sir Leicester Shorthorn, M.P.—or, as he was now called, the Right Honourable Sir L. Shorthorn—was an eminent agriculturist, and one of the most renowned cattle-breeders in his county. He farmed upon scientific principles, regardless of expense ; but, an examination of the farm accounts proved that every individual strawberry cost about one shilling and fourpence ; and that many other operations carried on upon Sir Leicester's reclaimed land produced an equally profitable result, with a similar expenditure of capital.

As a breeder of cattle, Sir Leicester had even a greater reputation ; and it was his boast that Ramborough had always carried away the first prizes at the annual shows, and that he had always carried away the prizes from Ramborough. His great object seemed to be to fatten bullocks into hippopotami ; to fatten sheep into hogs ; to fatten hogs into hogsheads ; and it must be confessed that he succeeded.

Sir Leicester's great aider and abettor in these useful country arts was my honoured father. A man of some property, and an inde-

pendent freehold farmer, he had no reason to flatter Sir Leicester, or to sacrifice his own fair fame as a cattle-breeder for Sir Leicester's sake; but still he did both these things, and prided himself upon his independent shrewdness.

As soon as the news of Sir Leicester Shorthorn's elevation as First Lord of the Admiralty came down to Ramborough, I was summoned before my father.

'Wull, lad,' he said (for he always spoke with a Ramborough twang), 'I told 'ee the government folks couldn't do wi'out a Ram-boro' mon, didn't I?'

'Yes, father,' I said, dutifully submitting to be bored.

'Ah,' he continued with a chuckle, 'if he wun't cross 'em, an' breed 'em, an' fatten 'em oop, lad, I don't know who wull!'

'Fatten what up, father?' I inquired.

'Why, ships, lad,' he answered: 'art a fule?'

'No,' I said rather indignantly, 'but I don't see what Sir Leicester can know about the royal navy?'

'Wull, wull,' he replied, 'thee'st got nowt to do wi' that. Wou'd 'ee loike to be a lootenant, lad?'

'You're joking,' I returned.

'I tell 'ee what,' he said, boiling over with satisfaction, 'it may be a good deal nigher than thee think'st. Dost 'ee know how Sir Leicester got his prize for the fat bullock, last show?'

'No,' I replied, 'I can't say that I do.'

'Noa,' he returned, derisively, 'thee knows nowt. That bullock belonged to me. Now dost 'ee see? It's wull for 'ee that thy feyther's got a good lang 'ed on his shoulders.'

True enough, in a few weeks an official communication arrived at Ramborough, addressed to my father, which contained my appointment as naval cadet to H.M.S. Horseleech, seventy-two guns.

As the appointment was accompanied by an order for me to join my ship, and as the ship was on the stocks (I believe that was the term) at the Royal Dockyard of Marsh-Mallows, on the coast of Essex, I was immediately provided with a proper outfit by my father, who congratulated himself upon his wisdom and forethought, and I started for my destination.

Marsh-Mallows, which was situated up a creek, consisted of an irregular cluster of wooden houses, or huts, that smelt of sea-weed, tar, and shrimps, and were very shaky in windy weather. The Royal Dockyard was a large enclosure, surrounded by high brick walls, containing a flag-staff, a Commodore-Superintendent's residence, a num-

ber of smaller houses for sub-officers, and deputy sub-officers, a couple of store-buildings, a few old anchors, rotten bowsprits, rusty chain-cables, and piles of timber, with several boats and barges; an old ship lying helplessly high and dry; another unfinished, floating clumsily in the water, and several sheds under which other vessels were supposed to be in rapid process of construction. It returned two members to Parliament.

I lost no time in presenting my credentials to the Commodore-Superintendent, who received me very graciously, in a style half-landsman, half-retired naval officer.

‘Ah,’ he said, with a loud, gusty sigh, over some sherry and biscuits which he produced, ‘the service now, youngster, isn’t what it was when I was your age.’

‘Isn’t it, sir?’ I said, timidly, anxious for further information.

‘They used to appoint us to a vessel then,’ he replied, ‘and let us do as we liked until she was finished; but now you’re sent down to the yard to hang about an old hull, to watch every nail that’s put into her, and to learn your duties in shore-going fashion, until she’s finished.’

‘What’s the cause of this change?’ I said.

‘What’s the cause of it?’ he replied, violently and contemptuously. ‘Reform Bills are the cause of it; and they’ll ruin the country if you’ll only let ’em. They’re the dearest bills Old England has got to pay.’

‘No doubt of it, sir,’ I returned, nervously, not feeling quite easy under the conversation.

‘I suppose you’ll mess with the others?’ he asked.

‘With the others?’ I repeated.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘with the other officers, at the Saucy Arethusa?’

‘I think,’ I returned diffidently, ‘if you look at the paper, you will find that I am appointed to the Horseleece.’

‘There’s no Horseleece built yet,’ he almost shouted, ‘and won’t be, perhaps, for some years to come!’

‘Oh!’ I said.

‘The fact is,’ he explained, ‘you’re appointed to the plan of a ship, at full-pay; and, if you take my advice, you’ll make yourself very comfortable with your messmates, who are appointed in the same way; and secure a berth at the Saucy Arethusa, which is the chief hotel, inn, and pothouse in the town.’

I saw he was not a person to be patient much longer under my inexperience, and I at once took the hint.

I engaged my quarters at the Saucy Arethusa, where everything seemed salt, and smelt fishy, and where my bed-room was all downhill towards the narrow street, and everything in it the colour of Spanish liquorice.

The men who had also been appointed to the Horseleece were ten in number : nine naval cadets, and a second lieutenant ; and they had all got over the novelty of their position, and were prepared to amuse themselves with me.

The first morning that I spent in Marsh-Mallows I devoted to what I considered my duties. I went to the dockyard in good time, and seeing a middle-aged, weather-beaten, seafaring-looking man leaning on a post, and staring vacantly into a muddy dock-basin, I blandly asked him to show me the way to H.M.S. Horseleece. He turned his head slowly towards me, closing one eye, and peeping at me out of the other, while he rolled a lump of tobacco in his mouth as large as an apple, and pointed with a thick, brown forefinger in a straight line over my head. I followed the direction indicated, until I came to a large shed, under which were about half-a-dozen men, as far as I could make out, driving piles of timber into the ground. I put the same question to them as I had put to the taciturn mariner, and was answered at once by one of the group, who scarcely stopped his hammer to speak to me.

‘If you’re a-lookin’ for that vessel, as you calls it, you’ll ’ave to look long enough, for we only begun ’er this day month.’

‘I am looking for that vessel,’ I replied, with some dignity, ‘as a junior officer appointed to watch over her progress.’

‘Ay, ay,’ replied the man, with a little more respect in his tone ; ‘watch away, then, sir, for ’ere you are.’

And I did watch for a few hours, until I got tired, without becoming much wiser. When the men went to dinner, punctually at the ringing of a bell, I examined the work ; and saw one long piece of timber lying at full length ; several short upright pieces of timber ; and several other short pieces running across. This is all I could make out, and I returned to the friendly shelter of the Saucy Arethusa, moderately satisfied with my morning’s occupation.

I soon found that to attempt to do anything out of the regular routine—which consisted in learning to row about the harbour, and other nautical accomplishments aboard some of the ships afloat in it—was only to make enemies of my companions, and the officers about the dockyard. In a wonderfully short space of time I became a satisfied, jolly member of the mess, caring nothing for the progress of H.M.S.

Horseleece, or any other wooden wall of old England that might be upon the stocks.

Six months passed away, and as winter approached, we set up a billiard-table, by subscription, over which we passed nearly the whole of our leisure. The small circulating library of Marsh-Mallows had been read through by those who were fond of books; and we had begun to borrow from the scanty store belonging to the Commodore-Superintendent. This source did not last very long; for his lady soon complained of the dirt that was on them when they were returned, and of the powerful smell of tobacco-smoke which hung about them ever afterwards.

Even in this stagnant service we had been favoured with a few promotions. The first lieutenant of the Horseleece, whom we had never seen, was raised to captain; the second lieutenant became the first; and I was appointed second lieutenant in his place, much to the gratification of my honoured father, who blessed the day on which he had lent the Right Hon. Sir Leicester Shorthorn that over-fed bullock.

I was now on more equal visiting terms with the Commodore-Superintendent, and I began to grow more reconciled to Marsh-Mallows, and its royal, but sleepy dockyard. The Commodore and his lady were blessed with two fair daughters, one about sixteen, and the other about eighteen; and as they saw very little company, and were charmingly unsophisticated, my Ramborough manners gave as much satisfaction as if they had had the true metropolitan polish. By degrees I deserted the fishy apartments of the Saucy Arethusa, and was frequently found attending the young ladies in their country rambles; or turning over their sentimental music as they sang love-songs at the pianoforte.

The forms of authority were properly observed between my junior officers and myself; and, although the Horseleece was still nothing but a straggling bunch of bare planks, and did not seem to me to advance six inches a-day, no midshipman was allowed to quit Marsh-Mallows without obtaining a formal leave of absence.

One day the works of the Horseleece were brought to a dead lock, by reason of a difficulty which nobody seemed to understand, except the master-shipwright and one or two of his confidential workmen. What this difficulty was I could never understand, but I know what steps were taken to set it right. The master-shipwright was directed to put his thoughts upon paper, and submit them to the foreman, or some such officer of the dockyard.

The foreman, having read and considered the remarks of the master-shipwright, then made a report to the Commodore-Superintendent; which, after reading and having copied, the Commodore sent up to Somerset House. From Somerset House, after its examination, this report was sent to the Admiralty, at Charing-cross, where it rested for some weeks. At the end of this time it was returned, with instructions, to Somerset House; from Somerset House to the Commodore-Superintendent, whom it never reached, for, unfortunately, it was lost on the way. The same process had to be gone through again almost from the beginning, starting from the copy of the report, which the Commodore had kept; and, for several months, the slumbering Horseleece lay a silent deserted ruin in the Marsh-Mallows dockyard.

At last, the proper official instructions were received, duly checked, signed and countersigned, and once more the cheerful clink of hammers was heard under the familiar shed. The hull gradually began to assume less the appearance of a timber jungle, and more the appearance of a ship, when, one morning, intelligence came of a sudden change of ministry, with the appointment of new Admiralty secretaries, and new officials of all kinds. The navy surveyor, for political reasons, also resigned, and a new one, connected with the party now in power, was gazetted in his place. The Commodore-Superintendent, an old and experienced officer, knew exactly what this meant, and he gave orders throughout the dockyard to cease all work for a few weeks, except what was absolutely necessary.

It was very quickly found out that no work was necessary, except the sweeping and clearing up of the yard, to make it look creditably neat; and this task was scarcely finished before the new surveyor and some other minor officials arrived on a visit of inspection. The Horseleece up to this time had been a strictly Tory ship. It had been laid down by the directions of Sir Leicester Shorthorn, a Tory First Lord of the Admiralty; it had been examined, once or twice, by a Tory Surveyor-General, and it had advanced thus far towards completion under a Tory administration.

The new ministers were Whig—old Whig to the back-bone. Their surveyor was a man devoted to his party, and, in his own estimation, the only competent government shipbuilder in the world. There were several old hulks still lying about the yard, which had been commenced, when the Whigs had been in office before; but somehow a Whig vessel found no favour in Tory eyes, and the late Tory surveyor had spent a few years, and some hundreds of thousands

of pounds, in endeavouring to remove the taint of their original political sin. His guiding maxim was—never spoil your ship for a hundred thousand pounds' worth of tar. Some had been built up or pulled down; some had been lengthened or shortened; some had been lightened, weighted, or spliced; but all after being played with for a time, were deserted as hopeless Whig failures; and the whole energies of the Tory government, what little they had, were devoted to those wooden walls of old England that were of pure, unsullied, high-Tory birth.

These eye-sores stood full before the Whig surveyor as he inspected the Tory vessels on the stocks.

'Good Gawd, gentlemen!' he said, looking at the unfortunate *Horseleece* through an eye-glass, 'what have we here?'

It seemed to be the rule that no one permanently connected with the dockyard was to answer; but that they were to leave it to the gentlemen who followed in the surveyor's train.

'Well, Sir William,' said a bland gentleman, shrugging his shoulders, 'it's the old story—one of *his* construction. I don't think I need say any more.'

'It's a most wonderful thing,' continued the surveyor, whom they called Sir William, 'but that party never could build a vessel. Never.'

'Very true,' remarked several of the gentlemen in chorus, 'very true.'

'I said it twenty years ago,' resumed Sir William, 'and I say it again. They can't do it. It's beyond them.'

'Very true, Sir William,' again responded the chorus, 'very true.'

'Commodore,' said Sir William, turning to the superintendent, 'we'll have this vessel seen to, the very first thing. You shall have your instructions in the course of the month.'

The inspection terminated soon afterwards, and this remark was considered to foreshadow the death-warrant of the *Horseleece*. The instructions, when they came, were quite as we expected. She was to be cut down from a three-decker to a two-decker, and the middle was to be taken clean away, in order that she might be converted into a steamer. She had already cost the country a quarter of a million of money under the late Tory First Lord of the Admiralty, the eminent agriculturist; and she was now made to consume an additional one hundred thousand pounds under the orders of a Whig First Lord.

During the eighteen months that she was undergoing the transformation decreed by her new political masters, my attentions to the Commodore-Superintendent's daughters became every day more

assiduous, and, at last, I was induced to make a passionate declaration to the youngest, which left no doubt whatever in the young lady's mind about my sentiments.

'If,' I said, 'you can consent to become united to a man whose ship is nearly ready for sea, and who may be ordered at a minute's notice to any part of the globe, that man now stands before you.'

'Oh,' she said, with charming frankness, 'if you allude to the *Horseleeche*, you may rest quite content, for during the last twelve years—that is, since I've had the power of looking about me—I never yet knew any ship successfully launched out of papa's yard.'

'Then you consent?' I asked.

'Ye—s,' she answered—'that is, you may ask papa.'

I mentioned the interesting business to the Commodore-Superintendent, but he was too much occupied to give me an answer till after the launch of the *Horseleeche*, which was fixed for the next day. At the appointed hour the usual crowd assembled to witness the spectacle; the usual flags were flying, and the usual Marsh-Mallows Amateur Dockyard Brass Band were lustily bleating forth some national patriotic airs.

The transformed vessel, ready for launching at last, looked tolerably trim to my not very experienced eye; though some of the old workmen, when they spoke of her, shook their heads. I stood upon the deck by the side of the Commodore! the bottle of wine was thrown by her whom I adored, the vessel was named, the blocks were struck away, and she glided quickly down her ways. She reached the water, but she obstinately refused to stand upright; and, after a little hesitation, she fell over and settled low in the mud of the creek.

All on board were immersed, but fortunately no one was lost. What I did I scarcely know, except that I swam vigorously to land under a heavy weight, and they told me I had saved one whom I was soon to call a father—the Commodore.

His wife wanted him to retire upon half-pay after this exciting event, but he could not be persuaded to desert his post. He gave me his daughter out of gratitude for his preservation, and we were married in the dockyard chapel. A parliamentary investigation followed this accident, and a few vulgar financial reformers in the House spoke very strongly against the errors of a system that buried half a million of the country's money in the slimy mud of a channel creek. The country's representatives, however, did not heed them much; the system was declared to be perfect—absolutely perfect.

I have never been to sea; I am still second-lieutenant upon full-

pay of H.M.S. Horseleech (we will say nothing about the guns); and H.M.S. Horseleech is still on the bank of the dockyard, where they hauled her after the morning of the attempted launch, the finest specimen of dry-rot in naval architecture that the British or any other navy can have to show.

A STARTLING CONFESSION.



WILL no longer conceal the fact from an excited world :
—I am the man—the miscreant—the morbid maniac—the misguided wretch, if you will have it so, who burned down Shakespeare's house, on the night of the eighteenth of March, one thousand eight hundred and fifty-seven. I am not an irresponsible being; I am cool and collected, I am in full possession of all my faculties, I never even wrote a commentary upon the works of the man whose memory I have injured, I was not hurried into the execution of the deed by any rash impulse, it was a well-matured, deliberate act, and I glory in it. It is not given to all men to have high aspirations. The Duke of Wellington won the battle of Waterloo; Lord Cardigan would have been content with describing it. Many men have shot at royalty, some have stolen Babylonian testers, others have cracked a Portland vase. There are some inferior minds that find a feeble pleasure in carving the name of the beloved one across the nose of an Elgin marble, or poking an umbrella through a Holy Family. Others, who would shrink from the crime of defacing a statue, will 'edit' a book, and scrawl it all over with 'notes,' signed with their names at full length. Many well-regulated members of literary society have not the courage to strike an enemy on the mouth in the open highway, they call him anonymously a liar, a thief, and a jackass, in the columns of their particular organ, and they send their children to the sea-side with the proceeds of the article. I am a practical man, and do not war with ink-stands. If I thought Mahomet an impostor, I should not write tracts to prove him so, I should tear his coffin down though all Mecca ran with molten lead. I hate Shakespeare, and I have annihilated the accursed barn that has for years attracted the attention of the world as his birthplace.

I will explain all—the cause as well as the effect—the origin of my hate, and my motive for action. I was the author of a tragedy—a

tragedy in twelve acts, with thirty-six tableaux, and seventy-two scenes, with one hundred and forty-four deaths, murders in every form that the ingenuity of man can suggest, in which the dead were piled up in the orchestra as they were in a plague-pit of the olden time, and the blood was mopped up like water between the parts—(for which the indulgence of the audience was requested), and which was strengthened by a metaphysical under-current that would have employed the analytical powers of the critics till the day of judgment. This monument of my genius, the result of twelve years' seclusion, hard study, and unremitting toil, was destroyed by a set of whirling bacchanals in as many minutes. When my work was completed, it was placed in the hands of the most eminent manager in London for perusal. Time rolled on. Shakespeare was on the stage, was in the bills, was in the green-room, the past, present, and future of the theatre. I received no communication. I waited two years; and still Shakespeare held possession of the field. When I saw the eternal underlining of his name in the bills, I felt that I could have wrung the neck of the Swan of Avon. One memorable morning the newspaper conveyed to my anxious eyes the startling intelligence that part of the theatre had been burned down by an accident during part of the performance of a play of Shakespeare's—the eternal Shakespeare's—on the previous night. I rushed to the place and found my worst forebodings realized. A troop of supers, maddened by the wild whirlings of a Satyr dance, had accidentally fired the theatre, and the library with all its contents was totally destroyed. I will not dwell further upon the painful subject. Compensation—poor satisfaction—was offered me, and at once refused. My hatred of Shakespeare had now developed into a settled plan of revenge, and I avoided anything that might have turned me from my purpose. I decided at once to destroy the shrine of the saint,—the butcher's shop,—the miserable hut at Stratford-on-Avon.

I am not a man to sleep upon my resolves. The next day found me walking up that quiet street in Stratford. I entered the house in which the play-wright, my enemy, was born, with a strange pleasure akin to that which a Huron Indian might feel when the scalp of the white man is in his grasp, or a native of Otaheite, while surveying the approach of a vessel of victims. It was about four in the afternoon, and I prayed for the shades of night, that I might commence the work of destruction. It was not the fear of punishment that deterred me even then, in the broad daylight, from pulling down the frail rafters, and crunching the whitewashed, autograph scribbled wall

in my sacrificial hand : it was the fear of failure. I restrained myself by a superhuman effort, and went calmly over the premises, listening with affected attention to the story of the female guide. Here he was born ;—here the viper was nourished that had stung me to the heart.

She read over to me the list of the worshippers at the shrine ; read them from where they were registered, on window panes, on the ceiling, in corners, across each other on the wall—upon the floor—within the chimney—clustering upon the ricketty door, a curious mosaic of human names, from the vice-regent of God upon earth to the common hangman. How very like a lot of commentators they looked, the clinging parasites. She told me how kings had come to that wretched hut, come with all their state and left it at the door, entering meek and humble as the poorest of us all. How one whose name the world had learned to curse was found in tears, thinking perhaps of all his misspent life ; thinking of the bitter pages of history ; thinking how few would seek *his* princely birthplace with feelings of love and reverence, save for its splendid architecture, its gorgeous pictures, its works of genius which he could only buy. Did I waver in my stern resolve ? Perhaps, for a moment : but I thought of my burning play, and steeled my heart. I paid the fee to my conductress—nearly the last fee she was destined to receive—and descended the stairs. At the door was a lounging London idler, with a party of ladies, who inquired, in a drawling tone,—‘ Aw,—— is this Shakespeare’s house ? ’ No, I thought, as I wended my way to the inn, it is mine,—mine, body and soul.

It was a dark night, and by nine o’clock, in the part of the town where the house stood, you could scarcely see across the road. Before ten the street was clear, the whole of the inhabitants had retired to rest, and only here and there did a solitary candle linger in the windows of the bed-chambers, slightly relieving the surrounding gloom. I sallied forth, nerved for the deed, and fully prepared with the materials for executing it. Half a dozen balls of pitched tow, and some matches to light them with, were what I had prepared for the task. I arrived before the house, no living creature watched my footsteps, and I found the upper window slightly open, as if favouring my design. The match and the ball of tow were in my hand. Did I hesitate at that instant ? Perhaps I did, but, like an ancient Image-Breaker, I overcame the momentary weakness, and hurled the burning missile into the sacred room. A faint light followed the act, which rose and fell several times, until at last it settled into a deep

glow, and I knew then that the house of my enemy, with all its traditions, its memorials and associations, would, in the short space of an hour, be numbered with the things that were.

The alarm was given, and the bewildered towns-people rose from their beds, and rushed to the fire. I stood on one side, watching the crowd, their faces lighted up with the glow. I watched them sternly and calmly as the dealer out of retributive justice. Some there were who looked on with a vacant gaze of speechless astonishment,—boors, irreclaimable boors;—others whose faces beamed with savage satisfaction, the animal pleasure of seeing a fire;—some, more thoughtful or calculating than the rest, presented sorrowful countenances, which plainly showed that they felt the glory of the town was departing. One little group particularly attracted my attention; they were four Germans from Munich. They had only just arrived in the town, on a pilgrimage of duty to the birthplace of Shakespeare, and had scarcely arranged for quarters at an hotel when they were called out to witness the fire. It was not easy, at first, to make them understand that the fast consuming ruin before them was the house of the play-wright—the house they had travelled so far to see. Perhaps they lingered too long amidst the seducing gaieties of the Metropolis; perhaps they had been indolent, and had missed an early train; whatever the cause, when the fact dawned upon them a concerted groan broke from the party, and a shadow of remorseful reproach spread over their faces. They had journeyed painfully to the hallowed shrine to find that its place knew it no more; to find the sacred fountain filled with sand from which they hoped to refresh their craving souls. That night four Wilhelm Meisters went to bed in the humble sleeping-rooms of the ‘Red Lion.’

The crowd all this time was active, but it was the unorganized activity of bewilderment and fear. However, they saved the solitary female in the house—my guide of the afternoon—though they could not preserve a stone of the building. She passed me in their arms, uttering loud and frequent protestations that she had put out her candle. To crown the evening’s proceedings, the local fire-engine made its appearance, slowly dragged by some aged paupers, who had been roused out of their beds, and were hardly awake enough to know what they were doing. It arrived on the spot just as the last darting flame had died away, and the choking white smoke began to ascend from the few embers that were yet left unconsumed upon the ground. The towns-people now gathered together in little conversational groups; some giving it as their opinion that the house was always

'a rotten old sty;' others were gathered round an energetic man, who was demonstrating that the fire arose purely from spontaneous combustion. I observed an active-looking man get into a gig, and drive sharply out towards the Leamington Road. He was hastening to telegraph the disaster to the London papers. I took the hint, and returned to my inn; a gig was soon got ready, and in a couple of hours I was at Warwick, seated in a first-class carriage of the London mail train. My companions did not disturb me; they had come through from the North, and were mere bundles of clothes, sleeping in varied and painful postures. If Birmingham had been burned down, it would not have disturbed them. As for myself, my revenge was satisfied; and feeling a sense of repletion like a starving man after a full meal, I slept soundly. At six o'clock the same morning I reached my lodgings without having met with any indication that the catastrophe at Stratford-on-Avon was yet known in town.

When I went to my club—about twelve o'clock the same day, I was conscious of a new feeling that had supplanted my old passion of revenge. I felt now as if I had the power of making myself invisible, and mingling in the world to hear the opinions of my fellow-men upon the deed of last night, without divulging my participation in it. Entering the news-room, I saw what I expected in the second edition of the *Times*:—

(BY ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH.)

GREAT FIRE AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON!

TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE!

At last I tasted the intoxicating pleasure of being the sole possessor of a great secret. How glorious it was to sit there and hear the remarks of the members upon the intelligence, their suppositions as to how the fire occurred, whether it was the result of accident or design, the various views which different men took of the loss, to be spoken to upon the subject, and, with so much knowledge, to affect an ignorance even below the general level. I now sympathized with the author of *Waverley*; and understood what Junius must have felt, as, wrapped in his impenetrable cloak, he read his letters in the columns of Woodfall's papers. I went into the street, and found little groups of men talking at corners, in omnibuses, in banking-houses, in coffee-rooms, upon 'Change, on steam-boats, everywhere the same, and I mingled with them as one of a superior race. How welcome to me was the flood of newspaper leaders which appeared

upon the all-engrossing subject for the next few days. I can quote some of the principal articles by heart:—

THE 'TIMES'—*March 20th, 1857.*

'Hardly has the public mind recovered from the shock caused by the destruction of the Great National Theatre, when it is again subject to a new trial by the intelligence conveyed in our columns of yesterday—the house in which the immortal Shakespeare was born has ceased to exist. The evidence at present before us goes to prove that it has fallen a sacrifice to the malice or folly of some miserable scoundrel whose morbid love of notoriety will probably be best served by the discovery and punishment which the crime so well merits. There are some men to whom obscurity is so distasteful that, rather than not be noticed at all, they would sigh out a serenade to the Princess Royal under the walls of Windsor Castle, or if not sentimentally but destructively inclined, would fire a handful of broad beans at Her Gracious Majesty while she was listening to the improper strains of the 'Traviata.' If the melancholy wretch, whom a few days will bring to justice, had felt a genuine 'call' for Iconoclastic labour, there is the Wellington Statue at Hyde Park Corner, and other metropolitan monstrosities, that he might have sacrificed to his love of destruction, and not one of the general public would have stayed his hand or regretted the accomplishment of the deed. But to take the trouble to journey into the heart of Warwickshire—for we assume that he is not a local maniac—and destroy the one house in the whole world which is cherished in the hearts of every man in the three kingdoms, shows a malicious ingenuity of design that removes the act out of the category of impulsive crimes, and calls for the most signal punishment. It is the duty of Government at once to offer an ample reward for the apprehension of the offender; and we would suggest that the dull monotony of the punishment should be relieved by a periodical and public application of the horse-whip. The arrangements at Stratford-on-Avon, in the event of fire, are worthy of record. The conflagration raged for nearly an hour and a half, during which time about four gallons of water were passed in domestic pipkins for half a mile from the river Avon, and at the close of the disaster the one wretched engine of the place arrived upon the scene of action, drawn by the feeble hands of some eight or ten half-fed octogenarian paupers.'

THE 'DAILY NEWS'—*March 20th, 1857..*

'It is astonishing how small a loss, in a pecuniary sense, may be regarded in the light of a national calamity. When we are told of the destruction by fire of a small, old, mean house in a provincial town, we pass over the paragraph with scarcely a glance, but when we hear that that house was the birthplace of William Shakespeare, there is not a man in the three kingdoms who would not have given up a colony rather than the loss should have happened. A cold-blooded Manchester utilitarian may prove to us by the tables of an Insurance Company, or a house agent's valuation, that what we are weeping about was, after all, only bricks and mortar, that can be replaced at less than the price of an ordinary watch, but let us tell the mere political economist that there are greater things than are dreamed of in his philosophy. The great heart of the country on an occasion like this is not to be solaced by an empty syllogism, or a slice of barren statistics. Gone at last is the one material link that bound us to the poet—the house that sheltered the infant head of the inspired child is now a melancholy heap of blackened ruins. If it has fallen a sacrifice to the morbid love of notoriety of some

misguided villain, the mind trembles to think at what a cost that notoriety has been purchased. Better for him would it have been, when he comes to the bar of public opinion, if he had destroyed the richest palace in the land—even the ducal Chatsworth, with all its treasures of art and nature—rather than that one humble cottage in the town of Stratford-on-Avon.'

THE 'MORNING ADVERTISER'—*March 21st, 1857.*

'How long will Englishmen sit patiently under the accursed tyranny of Papal aggression, and the snake-like, stealthy artfulness of slimy Jesuitism? Not content with placing the works of the immortal Shakespeare, in company with all that is good, and beautiful, and true, under the damning ban of the Index Expurgatorium, their insatiable thirst for conquest and hatred of freedom have led them to destroy the nest after trying to kill the bird—have led them to burn down Shakespeare's house at Stratford-on-Avon. Before the faces of our suffering countrymen *we boldly accuse the emissaries of the Pope of this dastardly and heinous crime!*'

'REYNOLDS'S NEWSPAPER'—*March 21st, 1857.*

'The house of Shakespeare—the man of the people—poor and humble as it was, was not too poor and humble to excite the jealousy of a bloated aristocracy. It has been destroyed by some toadying lord of the manor, who wished to ingratiate himself with those miserable compounds of vice and meanness, whose royal eyes were constantly offended by seeing such a wretched hovel command more veneration than all their leprous palaces. The transparent farce of an inquest will be gone through, but when ground-down tenants compose the jury and tyrannical landlords the judges, it is not difficult to foresee the result.'

THE 'ATHENÆUM'—*March 21st, 1857.*

'The public mind has been greatly shocked to hear that the house usually called Shakespeare's, at Stratford-on-Avon, has been destroyed by fire, and we shall, probably, offend many of our readers when we say that we are not sorry for it. It is at all times an unpopular and ungracious task to endeavour to dispel pleasing illusions and arrive at the prosaic truth, but it must be done. The man who first discovered that our patron saint, St George, was a meat salesman at Marseilles, was not thanked for the discovery, but he was a public benefactor for all that. The evidence that William Shakespeare the dramatist was ever at Stratford-on-Avon *at all*—as we have before stated in this journal (ante p. 418, p. 912, 1850),—has always seemed to us of the most untrustworthy description. But that he was *born* in the town we most distinctly deny, and the length of time that this belief has obtained, and the strength of that belief, are only fresh instances of that culpable indolence and negligence of editors—so called—who will take the most improbable and contradictory statements for granted rather than go into the next street to test their accuracy. Our space this week will not allow of our going into full details, but we may state that we have important documents in our possession proving incontestably two things: first, that the *whole street* at Stratford-on-Avon, in which the house said to be William Shakespeare's birthplace stands, was built by a Birmingham contractor in 1693, or one hundred and twenty-nine years after Shakespeare is said to have come into existence; and secondly, that William Shakespeare the dramatist was born, lived, and died at Stratford in Essex, called by Chaucer 'Strattforde-atte-Bowe.'

* * * * *

Some months have now elapsed since the deed was done; and the memory of it is now beginning to grow fainter in the public mind. A Government reward was offered, but the rain has nearly washed the placards from the walls, or they have been covered over by other announcements of the hour. I have never yet divulged who I am. That is a secret that will die with me.*

THE LEVIATHAN CHEESE.



THINK if the liberty and the power were given me to punish my bitterest enemy, I should cause him to become a giant. I can conceive no position likely to be more fruitful of misery and annoyance to him, or more fruitful of revengeful gratification to me. He would be one of a limited, but unfortunate, tribe, whose existence must constantly remind them that they are not made to measure. At every turn in the valley of life he would find himself a huge misfit. His head would bump against the upper cornice as he came in at an ordinary door; his legs would be difficult to dispose of, under the widest dining-table; his boots would cost him double the price of any other man's boots; his sixteen-shilling trouser-maker would strike, every time his broad countenance looked in at the shop-window; his appetite would be expensive; his omnibus conductor would never see him; and his cabmen would fly from him as they do from a well-known sixpenny passenger. If he indulged in reading, and felt curious about the history of his fellows, he would open one of the most melancholy pages in the whole range of personal records. The general fate of kings seems sad enough, but the fate of giants is surely sadder. Some have been struck down by inspired mannikins: some have sunk under the degrading monotony of being nothing but a constant spectacle; while others have lived only as carriers of advertising placards.

The unfortunate destiny of giants animate, is shared by giants inanimate. The wicker representatives of Gog and Magog have, ere now, been half devoured by rats; the Colossus of Rhodes was hurled down by an early earthquake; the Pyramids still exist, but only as unproductive cemeteries; the largest picture in London—the 'Raising of Lazarus'—has been pining unpurchased, for years, amongst toys

* Reprinted from the *Train Magazine*.

and parrots ; and the most recent ambitious effort of joint-stock enterprise—the big ship—is little more, at present, than a disastrous experiment. Every town and village, and country, can tell its story of some unwieldy local monster, who started into life with every prospect of a brilliant career, and ended as another example of the emptiness of human greatness. It matters little of what material this monster may have been made, for iron and wood have gone the way of flesh and blood, and stone has fallen under the inevitable doom. How, then, in the face of all this, could the villagers of West Pennard expect a happier destiny for that gigantic cheese, whose history has yet to be inserted in the archives of Somerset ?

If the Queen of England had never been presented with a gigantic brown loaf (about the year eighteen hundred and forty-eight), it is more than probable that this once famous cheese would never have been heard of. The mind of West Pennard, as represented by its principal farmers, in tavern assembled, had come to the conclusion that a large loaf, without an equally large cheese, was worse than useless. As no presentation, however extraordinary, is considered too extravagant or absurd to make to the British Sovereign, the West Pennard farmers decided that an enormous cheese should be at once manufactured for royalty, and a committee was immediately formed to conduct the necessary business. An active canvass was commenced the next morning throughout the parish for contributions, and not a single farmer refused a liberal supply of milk. Some became so interested in the Leviathan Cheese that they gave their whole day's produce ; and the contributions, taken together, amounted to the milk of seven hundred and thirty-seven cows.

The next step taken was to get a proper 'vat' and 'follower' made of solid mahogany : and the latter vessel was handsomely adorned with the royal arms. The eventful day being fixed, seven of the largest cheese-tubs in West Pennard were borrowed, the best dairy-woman in the parish was selected, and the lines of the Leviathan Cheese were laid down.

A few days afterwards, when the cheese was considered sufficiently pressed, and the donors had assembled in great force to witness the launch of their property, the first hitch occurred in the life of the giant. It stuck to the sides of its mahogany dwelling, and obstinately refused to come out without being taken to pieces. A council was immediately held to consult about this unexpected difficulty, and it was resolved that the experiment should be tried of grinding the curd again, and rubbing it with dry cloths, as too much whey was

considered to be the cause of the failure. The second effort was crowned with the desired success, and a real Somersetshire cheese was produced, weighing about half a ton.

The fame of this giant cheese soon spread far and wide, and many hundreds of people came from all parts of the county to see it. It remained under the care of the chosen dairy-woman until it was pronounced sufficiently firm to be moved; the price of admission for each visitor, in the mean time, being fixed at a shilling. At this point, one of the donors kindly offered to give up his parlour, a large and convenient room, to ripen it in, and this offer being accepted, it was removed to its new quarters, carefully bound up in its former mahogany casing to secure it from injury. The weight and size of the giant rendered it impossible to 'turn' it without the aid of machinery, and an apparatus was constructed which brought this very necessary operation in cheese-making within the power of one person. Notwithstanding this invention, the rest of the farmers could not trust the handling of so valuable a prize to one man, and they assembled nearly every afternoon at the house of the keeper to watch the development of their property. As a want of hospitality is not a West Pennard failing, the host was very liberal with his best cider, and by the time the process of 'ripening' was considered complete (a period of several months), the whole of his previous year's making of cider—from twenty to thirty hogsheads—had thoroughly disappeared. The number of nights on which late sounds of conviviality were heard roaring round this giant cheese are tenaciously remembered by many good wives in West Pennard.

The cheese being now fit for presentation to her Majesty, a great meeting of shareholders was held, and a deputation chosen, consisting of three of the principal proprietors. To give this deputation greater importance, the parish factotum was elected to accompany it. That nothing might be wanting to render it worthy of the occasion, the four delegates were arrayed in new suits of clothes, made under general advice by a fashionable tailor.

The Leviathan Cheese, duly launched, was taken to London by this imposing guard of honour, and laid at the feet of her gracious Majesty. Its reception by royalty was everything that West Pennard could have wished, the only objection to the giant being its extreme youth. As it was not considered old enough to cut, her Majesty requested the delegates to take it back, and present it again at a more mature age, when she promised a donation of one hundred pounds to the poor of the giant's parish.

When the delegates returned to West Pennard, they gave a highly glowing account—in fact, many highly glowing accounts—of their reception at the palace. They spoke particularly of his Royal Highness Prince Albert in terms of the warmest admiration, and remarked, almost familiarly, that ‘they had never met a nicer fellow.’ So much did they dwell upon this portion of their narrative, that the original curiosity of their listeners and fellow-shareholders soon changed to jealousy. Knighthood was the least honour expected to follow such a reception; a prospect not at all pleasing to the general body of contributors. This feeling grew at last into open rebellion, and attempts were made to get possession of the Leviathan Cheese. A considerable reward was even offered to any one who would cut or damage it, and its trustees became so alarmed, that, at the cost of twelve pounds, they had a strong iron cage constructed for its safe-keeping, with a brilliant crown upon the top, to warn off all treasonable enemies. Not feeling secure even with this stronghold, and this emblem of authority, they caused heavy iron bars to be affixed to the windows of the room in which the caged giant was deposited; also to the mantelpiece, as some daring, disloyal chimney-sweep from Bath had undertaken to get down the chimney at night and basely earn the reward.

The three members of the deputation, omitting the factotum, resided at Sticklings, Woodlands, and East Street, and the united parish, fearing that, from the excitement and ill-feeling, the honour which seemed likely to fall upon it might be lost for ever, very wisely took the power of conferring the expected patents of nobility into its own hands; and the three farmers, under the action of the parochial will, became respectively the Marquis of Sticklings, the Duke of Woodlands, and Lord East Street. This proceeding rather increased the jealousy and activity of the opposition; and, by some means, they obtained possession of the mahogany vat and follower. Making a plaster of Paris imitation of the Leviathan Cheese, they started an exhibition in London, and kept it open for some months with considerable success. Upon this the Marquis of Sticklings, the Duke of Woodlands, and Lord East Street, having asked and gained the permission of her gracious Majesty to exhibit the real, original giant, they took a room, as all passing exhibitors used to do some ten years ago, at the Egyptian Hall. It was now the turn of the plaster of Paris party to make another move, and flying to Chancery, they obtained an injunction prohibiting the exhibition, in London, of the original Leviathan. Driven from the metropolis, the giant and its

trustees went to the country, and pitched their tents, to some purpose, in several of the largest towns in Somersetshire. If the Marquis of Sticklings, the Duke of Woodlands, and Lord East Street had been ordinary showmen, with no recently acquired and extraordinary dignity to maintain, a fair amount might have been realized by the exhibition of the giant; but, as they were very careful not to disgrace their titles by any display of meanness or economy, they spent all the money they received, neglected their farms, and were several hundred pounds out of pocket besides. The plaster of Paris party were also losers by the contest, their law and other expenses amounting to a nearly equal sum.

The Leviathan Cheese was ultimately taken to its old abode, the residence of the Marquis of Sticklings, where it remained until the death of that esteemed nobleman. It was then removed to the house of the Duke of Woodlands, where it rested, an unfortunate, worn-out, neglected giant, until his grace gave up farming, and took upon himself the management of the Old Down Inn, on the Mendip Hills. The history of the giant Cheese, from this moment, becomes exceedingly obscure. Individual testimony fades away, and report—the vaguest kind of report—only stands in its place. This report asserts that the giant cheese was tried, and found lamentably wanting. Its greatest friends, after tasting it, could not conscientiously pronounce it to be first-rate. It went the way of all giants, leviathans, mammoths, and nine-days' wonders. Let us draw a veil over its wretched ending: it was given to the pigs.

Though dead, and consumed in every material sense, like many more once famous animate and inanimate giants, it still lives again in immortal verse. His grace the Duke of Woodlands composed a song about it, which he had wedded to immortal music, and which, after the fashion of Homer, he was proud of singing to himself.*

* I am indebted to an unknown correspondent for the facts in this story: they were sent to Mr Dickens, and handed over to me.



THE PHANTOM GENIUS.

PART I.



OM MOLESKIN was a very excellent specimen of a common, uneducated working-man. His ideas were very limited; his language was even more limited; and his only ambition was to work regularly, eat regularly, sleep regularly, cultivate pigeons on the top of his little house, and live near where his bread grew—within sight of his factory chimney, and within hearing of his factory bell. His little house, or castle, was in a back lane of Lambeth, not far from the river. It was not a very sightly building; for Tom's means were very humble, and he had to select a dwelling at a very moderate rent. Such houses as Tom required, lying close to the factory where he worked, were not very numerous, and the one he had now secured, old and rickety as it was, was considered a prize by his fellow-workmen. Tom had even paid a small premium to buy out the last tenant, an idle, drunken workman, named Pothooks; and without having made any arrangement with the landlord for a lease, he considered that he had cast his domestic anchor for the next ten or twenty years.

As soon as Tom's Dutch clock struck one every working-day morning, the factory bell was heard ringing, and in a few minutes Tom always appeared, hungry and ready for his dinner. Mrs Moleskin, his wife, was a steady, industrious working-woman, and always prepared for his appearance—sometimes with a little surprise in the shape of some extra delicacy, for Tom liked to live well. Any morning between twelve and one, she might have been seen in her blue check gown, large apron, and cap, bustling about the thinly-furnished room, which was both kitchen and parlour, arranging the plates and knives and forks on the table. She was so discovered on the morning when our little story opens.

'There goes the bell at the works,' she said, as she lifted off the cover of a saucepan on the fire. 'I'm rather behind-hand to-day, because of those people calling. Tom 'll be home in a minute, and he always likes his dinner ready when he comes in.' She had hardly uttered these words before Tom made his appearance. He was a man about forty, dressed in thick, dark corduroy trousers, which were

half-covered with brick-dust; a red plush waistcoat, with pearl buttons; a dark-blue check shirt, a flannel jacket with pockets, a cap, and a red necktie. His shoes were muddy, his face was dirty at the lower part with a stiff beard, and his hair was rather gray.

‘Now, Nancy,’ he said, hanging up his cap behind the door, ‘dinner ready?’

‘Yes, Tom,’ returned Mrs Moleskin.

‘What is it?’ asked Tom, advancing to the table.

‘Well, dear,’ said Mrs Moleskin, ‘I’ve killed one of the fowls.’

‘Which one?’

‘Old Betsy.’

‘Old Betsy!’ exclaimed Tom; ‘what, the old hen as was always moping about? I say—’

‘Now, don’t be stupid,’ said Mrs Moleskin, taking off the cover; ‘you’ll see what a nice dinner it’ll make; it’s boiled.’

‘With inguns?’ asked Tom.

‘Yes,’ returned Mrs Moleskin, helping her husband very liberally, and seating herself opposite him.

‘Good!’ said Tom, with his mouth full, eating voraciously; ‘heavy day at the works to-day.’

‘Oh!’ replied Mrs Moleskin, rather absently.

‘Head overseer out o’ sorts, too,’ continued Tom.

‘I’ve got a good deal to tell you, Tom,’ said Mrs Moleskin, without seeming to notice what her husband was saying.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked Tom, with his mouth full.

‘I’ve had visitors,’ returned Mrs Moleskin, mysteriously.

‘Don’t talk with your mouth full,’ said Tom, reprovingly. ‘Who was it? Old Mother Brisket?’

‘No; a lady and gentleman.’

‘No Board o’ Works humbug, I hope?’

‘No, Tom,’ returned Mrs Moleskin, quickly and indistinctly, almost choking herself; ‘it was a young lady and gentleman; and they walked about, and they talked, and they looked round the room, and they read something from a newspaper, and they said it was the birthplace of Hooks, or Crooks, or something o’ that sort; and they said that when the young lady’s father read it at his club, he would come down at once in a cab; and they asked when you would be in, and—’

‘Halloo, Nancy!’ said Tom, astonished; ‘what are you talking about? Young lady and gentleman—newspaper—old gent—club—’

come down in a cab—birthplace of Hooks or Crooks! What's the birthplace of Hooks or Crooks?'

'This house, Tom; they said he was born in that room,' returned Mrs Moleskin, pointing to the door of a small apartment, which served them as a bed-room.

'Who was born in that room?' asked Tom, in a bewildered manner. 'Our Billy?'

'No, no,' returned Mrs Moleskin, 'Hooks or Crooks.'

'Who's Hooks or Crooks?' inquired Tom, getting out of temper.

'Oh, some great poet writer or other,' returned Mrs Moleskin. 'I don't know.'

At this point of the dinner-table conversation, a tapping was heard at the street-door, which had no knocker, and opened with a latch.

'Come in,' said Tom, loudly, with his mouth half-full of potato, turning partly round upon his chair.

The invitation was at once accepted by the persons outside, and a lady and gentleman, dressed rather extravagantly, and both carrying eye-glasses, entered the room. The lady was thin and middle-aged, with a rather red nose, and gray hair arranged in curls on each side of her face. They walked in with a patronizing air, and a look of abstraction and inquisitiveness; and while the lady looked eagerly round the place through her eye-glass, the gentleman referred to a newspaper which he carried in his hand. Mrs Moleskin regarded these visitors with curiosity; but Tom glared at them rather sullenly, with a knife in one hand, and a large piece of bread in the other.

'Is this the party?' Tom asked his wife, as the visitors were looking round the room.

'No,' replied Mrs Moleskin, 'this is some one else.'

'Now, sir,' said Tom, rising and facing his visitors, and addressing the gentleman, 'what can I do for *you*?'

'Don't disturb yourself, my good man, I beg,' replied the gentleman, looking about the room. 'We have merely come to pay our tribute to the shrine of genius. You may not be aware of it, but you are now standing in the birthplace of the immortal Pothooks. Go on with your dinner.'

'Finish your dinner, my good man,' continued the lady, abstractedly, also looking about the room; 'and let us feed on those sweet memories which hover about the hearth that was once honoured by the presence of the immortal Pothooks.'

‘Thank’ee, mum,’ returned Tom, sulkily, eating his bread.

‘Very neatly put, Penelope,’ said the gentleman, addressing the lady, almost without noticing Tom and his wife; ‘I’ll make a note of that.’

‘Perhaps at this table, Alonzo,’ returned the lady, advancing to a small table at the side of the room, and addressing the gentleman, ‘in this very room, were composed those noble, heart-stirring poems, “The Doctor’s Boy,” and the “Ode to Apoplexy!”’

‘Very neatly put, Penelope,’ answered the gentleman, ‘very neatly put; and very likely it was on this chair he sat.’ As he spoke, he seated himself on a chair, the seat of which gave way, and nearly let him down.

‘Take care, sir,’ said Mrs Moleskin, interposing, ‘that’s shaky.’

‘He couldn’t have sat on that, either,’ said the gentleman, struggling up on his feet, ‘for he was a very heavy man.’

Tom Moleskin regarded his strange visitors all this while with cool astonishment, following them with his eyes, and evidently trying to understand the meaning of their language and their visit. He soon came to a conclusion which was rather inhospitable.

‘Now, I dare say,’ said Tom, ‘it may seem imperent to you what I’m about to observe; but I want to know what the deuce you do walking about my room at dinner-time, as if it was the Natural Gallery or the British Mooseum?’

‘Sir?’ said the gentleman, in astonishment.

‘Sir to you!’ returned Tom, getting excited. ‘Take off your hat in a gen’lman’s house!’

The eccentric male visitor did as he was requested, and the lady took up the conversation.

‘We have come,’ she said, ‘to perform a sacred duty we owe to the memory of Pothooks—the divine Pothooks.’

‘I don’t know anything about the divine Pothooks, mum,’ said Tom, ‘and I don’t care. This apartment’s mine, and the rent’s paid. Nancy, purduce the rent-book.’

‘Here it is, Tom,’ returned Mrs Moleskin, handing him a small red account-book taken from the drawer of the dinner-table.

‘What grovelling ignorance!’ exclaimed the lady, addressing no one in particular.

‘I beg pardon,’ interposed the gentleman, ‘but I think you are under a mistake. Pothooks—the divine Pothooks, the great poet—we have every reason to believe, was born here. For years an anxious and admiring body of literary gentlemen have been endeavour-

ing to ascertain the exact house with something like precision ; and only this morning the learned and indefatigable editor of the *Weekly Mooner* was able to say, "This is the house—No. 9, Stoker's-lane, Lambeth." You will find it so stated in this newspaper.'

'What right's he to put my house in a paper?' asked Tom, indignantly. 'If I don't bring an action for labelling, my name's not Tom Moleskin.'

'Is it possible,' asked the lady, 'that you can hear without emotion that you stand in the very room which Pothooks has immortalized?'

'Read him that noble passage in the book you have in your pocket, Penelope,' said the gentleman, "'Ode to Apoplexy," page 40.'

'Now, look here,' replied Tom, trying to exert great command over himself, 'I'm a working man ; I go to my work every morning at six ; I knock off at one to get my dinner, and I've just got a hour to eat it in. You see that clock, and you see that dinner. One stands at half-arter one, and t'other's getting cold. If Pothooks was born here, it's a pity he didn't leave the place in better repair, that's all I can say. There's the door : Nancy, show 'em out.'

'Yes, Tom,' replied Mrs Moleskin, going to the door.

'Brief occupant of an immortal tenement,' said the gentleman, 'I scorn to commit violence in a place rendered sacred by the memory of Pothooks ; otherwise——'

'I'm not going to put myself in a passion with you,' said Tom, advancing ; 'but if you don't go out of that immortal door, I shall pitch you out of that immortal window.'

Tom began to take off his jacket, but Mrs Moleskin interfered, and the lady and gentleman went towards the door.

'Come, Penelope, come!' said the gentleman ; 'that ever fate should have thrown the birthplace of the immortal Pothooks into the hands of such a rude boor!'

Tom, by this time, had returned to the dinner-table ; but, upon hearing this last expression, he again began to take off his jacket, and Mrs Moleskin again interposed to preserve peace.

'Farewell, dear spot,' said the lady, with a romantic sigh, 'at once found and lost!'

'I've written my name in every corner of the place,' whispered the gentleman to his companion, as they went out. Mrs Moleskin immediately bolted the door after them.

'Pothooks ! confound Pothooks!' exclaimed Tom, indignantly, walking about the room ; 'why, that's the old fool we took this house

of, who comes in here drunk nearly every day to borrow money for gin !’

‘Yes, Tom,’ replied Mrs Moleskin, ‘and that’s the name the young lady and gentleman mentioned this morning.’

‘Oh, it is, is it ?’ said Tom ; ‘then we shall have another lot here.’

‘They said the young lady’s father would be sure to be here in a cab, as I told you.’

‘Blest if I don’t make a show of it,’ said Tom, sarcastically, ‘and charge a shilling each.’

This idea seemed to pacify Tom a little, and he sat down to finish his dinner, which was now nearly cold. Before he could begin, however, another tapping was heard at the door.

‘Who’s there ?’ shouted Tom, furiously, jumping up from his chair.

‘It’s me, Tom—young Johnson,’ said a voice outside.

‘What, Master Edmund ?’ exclaimed Tom, in a very altered tone, as he opened the door, ‘how are you ?’

‘How d’ye do, Tom ?’ said a good-looking, cheerful young man, shaking Tom by the hand, and entering the room, followed by a genteel young lady.

‘Allow me to introduce Miss Maresnest—Mrs Johnson that is to be,’ continued the new visitor, gaily pushing the young lady forward, and skipping lightly about the apartment.

‘Nonsense, Edmund !’ said the young lady, blushing ; ‘how you do go on !’

‘This is the young lady and gentleman,’ said Mrs Moleskin, crossing over to her husband, ‘who called this morning.’

‘No !’ replied Tom ; ‘and didn’t you know Master Edmund, that you have heard me talk of—the son of our head foreman at the yard ?’

‘I never saw him, you know, dear,’ said Mrs Moleskin, as she walked on one side with Miss Maresnest.

‘Well, now, Tom, to business,’ exclaimed young Johnson, stopping his dance about the room, and speaking to Tom Moleskin. ‘This is a serious job about this house.’

‘What house ?’ returned Tom, in his old sullen manner.

‘This house—your house ; the birthplace of Pothooks.’

‘Hang Pothooks ! You’re not going to worry me, are you ?’

‘There’s no mistake about it,’ said young Johnson, ‘you’ll have to leave.’

‘What for ?’ asked Tom, in a loud voice and a bewildered manner. ‘Is this my castle, or is it not ? I’m a working man——’

‘Now, Tom,’ replied young Johnson, ‘don’t excite yourself, and be practical. Old Maresnest, the father of that young lady there, will have this house over your head, if he gives twenty thousand pounds for it. It is the dream of his life to possess the birthplace of the immortal Pothooks.’

‘Why didn’t he come forward, then, and bid like a man?’ inquired Tom, still in a very loud voice.

‘But——’ interposed young Johnson.

‘Oh, I hate anything underhand,’ continued Tom, interrupting him in an indignant tone.

‘But,’ continued young Johnson, ‘he couldn’t tell till to-day that Pothooks, the poet, was born here.’

‘There’s been no Pothooks, the poet, ever born here,’ said Tom, with a strange expression on his face, intended to represent contempt at everybody’s ignorance and stupidity. ‘Old dirty Pothooks, as I took the place of, used to live here, and a nice state he left it in!’

‘Perhaps so, Tom,’ returned young Johnson, ‘perhaps so; and that may be the Pothooks that old Maresnest and all these people are after by mistake; but, for all that, you’ll have to leave this house.’

‘I think it’s precious hard,’ replied Tom, sulkily, ‘that just as I’ve settled down in a place within sight of the works, where I can hear the bell sound, after waiting patiently for two years, and buying one old Pothooks out, I’m to be bundled out myself, because a lot of fools fancy another old Pothooks was born here! I put it to you as a man: I put it to any man——’

‘Troublesome, Tom, I admit; but you’d better submit like a sensible fellow. An enthusiast like old Maresnest is not to be opposed by any rational means.’

‘Look here, Nancy,’ shouted Tom, turning to his wife, ‘here’s a pretty go! We must look out for another lodging.’

‘Yes, Tom,’ returned Mrs Moleskin, advancing with Miss Maresnest; ‘the young lady has told me all about it.’

‘I’m a working man,’ said Tom, rather sulkily, to Miss Maresnest; ‘I go to work at six in the morning. I knock off at one——’

‘Yes, yes,’ said young Johnson, interrupting him, ‘we know all that, Tom. Now, I want you to do me a service.’

‘Well, Master Edmund,’ returned Tom, a little less sulkily, ‘what is it?’

‘I need not tell you,’ said young Johnson, smiling, ‘that this young lady and I are rather—rather fond of each other.’

Mrs Moleskin laughed at this speech, and Miss Maresnest blushed

and simpered. Tom Moleskin made a jocular remark to his wife as he nudged her in the side, and told young Johnson to go on.

‘But what I need tell you,’ continued young Johnson, in answer to this request, ‘is, that her father, who happens to be her guardian, is mad upon the subject of the immortal Pothooks, and will never consent to her marrying any one but a descendant of that phantom celebrity.’

‘Good gracious!’ ejaculated Tom.

‘This obstacle to our union can only be removed by one brilliant stroke of policy—a very pardonable piece of deception, under the circumstances. You must become the son-in-law of the immortal Pothooks, Mrs Moleskin his daughter, and I the grandson on the mother’s side.’

‘What! son-in-law of old, dirty Pothooks?’ exclaimed Tom, restlessly. ‘Come!’

‘No, no,’ said young Johnson, pettishly, ‘the immortal Pothooks, you know.’

‘No, I don’t know; I can’t go through all that.’

‘Oh, I’m sure you can,’ interposed Miss Maresnest, persuasively. ‘Pa’ll never find it out—he’ll only be too glad to find so many descendants of Pothooks for that; and we shall help to cure him of a very ridiculous and expensive mania.’

At this juncture a knocking was heard at the street-door.

‘I’ll stand by you and do all the speaking,’ said young Johnson, hurriedly; ‘you leave it to me.’

The knocking was repeated.

‘Perhaps that is pa?’ suggested Miss Maresnest; and the remark caused young Johnson and Mrs Moleskin to disappear in the side room. Tom got very fidgetty, and looked restlessly at the clock, and gulped in his breath. Miss Maresnest walked to the window.

‘Well,’ said Tom, desperately, ‘I’m in for it now, so here goes.—Come in!’ he shouted at the top of his voice.

This invitation was responded to by a young, shabby-looking man, who passed through the door rapidly, turned round quickly, and closed it, fastening the bolt, and then looked inquiringly at Tom Moleskin.

‘Halloo there!’ shouted Tom, looking with astonishment on this curious proceeding, ‘what are you bolting my door for?’

‘Ah! I beg pardon,’ said the new visitor, advancing, and speaking confidentially to Tom; ‘are you the proprietor?’

‘Yes,’ replied Tom, sulkily, ‘I suppose I am.’

‘Has any one been here—any photographic artist—to take a picture of this place?’

‘Not as I’m aware on.’

‘Good,’ returned the new visitor. ‘Is she’—he added, pointing to Miss Maresnest—‘anything in that way?’

‘No,’ replied Tom.

‘Good again,’ said the new visitor. ‘Now, look here,’ he continued, handing a card to Tom, ‘I’m a first-class photographic artist—there’s my card. I don’t like to touch anything that’s not exclusive; you understand?’

‘Can’t say I do,’ replied Tom, becoming more sulky, and more bewildered.

‘If you want a pound, you can have it,’ returned the first-class photographic artist, drawing nearer to Tom, and whispering in his ear; ‘but I must get a week’s start with the picture of Pothook’s birthplace. You comprehend now?’

‘Can’t say I do,’ replied Tom.

‘Oh, these working-classes!’ exclaimed the first-class photographic artist, though not loud enough for Tom to hear what he said. ‘I must take a picture of this place,’ he added, addressing Tom, ‘and no other artist must be admitted for a week.—Quick!’ he continued, excitedly, ‘is that a bargain? I hear that confounded Stipple in the street.’

A violent knocking was heard at the little street-door, which shook with the blows delivered on it from the outside.

‘I don’t know who you are,’ said Tom, sullenly, ‘and I don’t know who you may be; but may I trouble you to open that door?’

‘And admit Stipple?’ inquired the first-class photographic artist, rather pettishly. ‘Very good,’ he added, ‘very good. If you’re deaf to your own interest, I can’t help it.’

The knocking was still continued.

‘Oh, yes!’ said the first-class photographic artist, as he threw open the door, ‘of course; there!’

The door was no sooner thrown open, than in rushed another shabby-looking young man, very much like the first visitor. He was followed by a dirty boy, who struggled in with a photographic apparatus, a large box, a three-legged stand, and a curtain, all complete.

‘Now, then!’ shouted Tom, looking upon this apparition with increased wonder and disgust; ‘what game d’ye call this?’

‘Upon my word,’ said the second visitor, with the greatest con-

fidence, almost disregarding Tom, 'artists are nicely treated now-a-days: any one would think the birthplace of genius was not public property!'

'These fellows seem to make themselves wonderfully at home,' said Tom, looking almost bewildered, first at one visitor, then at the other.

'I suppose I'm indebted to you, Mr Burin,' said the second visitor, addressing the first visitor, 'for this temporary lock-out? I owe you one, dear sir; I owe you one.'

The first visitor—the first-class photographic artist, as he called himself—seemed to despise this remark, and instead of making any reply, he went to the window near where Miss Maresnest was standing, opened it, and looked out.

'Bill,' he said to some one in the street, 'come in;' and another dirty boy struggled in with another photographic apparatus, very similar to the first. Both the boys proceeded to pitch their instruments in what they considered the best situations for their masters, and in doing this they first came to words, and then to blows.

'Come out of that!' shouted Tom, rushing forward, and pushing them out of the door; 'if anybody wants to fight, I can tackle 'em.'

'Proprietor, sir?' asked the second visitor, addressing Tom.

'No,' said Tom, with an attempt at sarcasm, 'no proprietor at all! Liberty Hall!'

'That's my card,' returned the second photographic artist, giving Tom a small card. The two rival artists then made preparations at the back to take views of the place, as coolly as if they had bought the lease, furniture, and pictures, or were brokers' men sent in to make an inventory. They got very much in each other's way, and seemed inclined to break out into an open quarrel at any moment.

'There comes papa,' said Miss Maresnest, excitedly, tripping down from the window, and addressing Tom; 'full speed, as I expected, in a cab.'

Mrs Moleskin and young Johnson, hearing this, came out of the side room to have another hurried conference, and to arrange for the reception of old Mr Maresnest.

'Now, then, for the little plot,' said young Johnson, rubbing his hands; 'it's sure to work well.'

'I don't much like this business,' said Tom, nervously, addressing his wife.

'Oh, I don't mind, if you don't,' replied Mrs Moleskin, who seemed more confident.

‘What am I?’ asked Tom, bewildered, speaking to young Johnson; ‘I’m sure to muddle it.’

‘The son-in-law of the immortal Pothooks,’ answered young Johnson; ‘I am the grandson on the mother’s side, and Mrs Moleskin is to personate the daughter. Emma—Miss Maresnest—will appear as if she had just arrived to inspect the premises.’

‘Very—well,’ responded Tom, very slowly.

The little group hastily arranged themselves round the dinner-table, with the exception of Miss Maresnest; and the two artists, who seemed to have either finished their views of the sitting-room, or to be anxious to seize upon some other points in the side room, both rushed into the last apartment, with sketching-books, and closed the door. The noise of wheels was heard outside, and in a few moments old Mr Maresnest burst into Tom Moleskin’s room.

PART II.

R MARESNEST was an elderly gentleman, tall, and not very stout; he wore spectacles, through which his eyes glittered eagerly; his dress was old-fashioned; and his necktie was an enormous white bandage. He looked a kind of man to attract furniture dealers, jobbers in old books and works of art. His manner was restless, hasty, and excited, but it was easy to see that he was very impressionable. He liked to possess rarities, or what were supposed to be rarities; and he liked to make discoveries, or what were supposed to be discoveries. Like all ‘collectors,’ as they are called, from collectors of pictures to collectors of poor-rates, he was eminently selfish.

‘Bless my heart!’ he said, speaking hurriedly, as he plunged into Tom Moleskin’s humble sitting-room, ‘what an astonishing thing, to be sure! I must have been past this house a hundred times, without having the slightest idea that it was Pothook’s birthplace. I thought it was in quite a different direction. It was that precious snuff-shop at Islington which threw me off the scent; I traced the immortal Pothooks there, and then I lost him.’

‘Papa,’ said Miss Maresnest, advancing, ‘you see I’ve got the start of you.’

‘Halloo, minx!’ returned Mr Maresnest, not at all astonished to

see his daughter, whom he left pretty much to take care of herself, while he indulged his hobby of curiosity-hunting. 'What, are you here? How did you find it out?'

'In the same way as you did, papa; in the *Weekly Mooner*.'

'Ha!' continued Mr Maresnest, enthusiastically, 'little did I imagine what a surprise awaited me when I reached the club. Little Button came up to me, and said, "Have you heard the news?" "No," said I; "what news?" "Well," said he, "they've found out Pot-hook's birthplace at last!" "No!" said I—and you might have knocked me down with a penny pamphlet—"where?" "In Lambeth," said he; "found it out by an old washerwoman's bill; you'll see it all in the *Weekly Mooner*." I flew to that learned and enterprising print, and found it all true; and I hastened on here at once.'

'Ah! papa,' replied Miss Maresnest, 'I think I've made a greater discovery than the editor of the *Weekly Mooner*.'

'Speak, child,' exclaimed Mr Maresnest. 'What is it?'

'Well,' replied Miss Maresnest, 'I believe I've discovered that the persons in possession of the house claim to be descendants of the illustrious Pothooks.'

'Gracious goodness!' shouted Mr Maresnest, 'where are they? Are they here?'

By this time young Johnson had arranged Mrs Moleskin and Tom at the little dinner-table, in what he considered a proper romantic, attitudinizing group. Mrs Moleskin was passive, but Tom was rather sulky, and difficult to deal with.

'Let me introduce to you, papa,' said Miss Maresnest, pointing to this group, 'the persons who claim to be the daughter, the son-in-law, and the grandson on the mother's side, of the poet Pothooks.'

'Is it possible,' exclaimed Mr Maresnest, regarding them with enthusiastic astonishment, 'that I look upon the intimate connections of that immortal man of genius, whose traces I thought at one time I had lost for ever?'

At this moment the work-bell of the neighbouring factory, where Tom Moleskin was employed, rang loudly to summon the labourers back from dinner.

'I must be off,' shouted Tom, starting up, and nearly knocking young Johnson down in his haste, 'or I shall get the sack!'

'Never, sir!' said Mr Maresnest, very excited, and restraining Tom: 'never, sir, not for all the factory bells in England!'

‘Sir?’ said Tom, evidently misapprehending Mr Maresnest’s meaning.

‘I say, not for all the factory bells in England!’ continued Mr Maresnest, raising his voice. ‘Shall I, after years of patient labour and watchfulness, which have led me to—to—to the only living link that binds me to the past—the past of the immortal Pothooks—allow that link to—to—to go from my gaze to a menial and dirty employment?’

‘What do you mean, sir?’ asked Tom excitedly; ‘I’m a working-man!’

‘For goodness’ sake, calm yourself,’ said young Johnson, speaking quietly to Tom, ‘or we shall spoil all. My supposed uncle, sir,’ he added, addressing himself to Mr Maresnest, ‘the reputed son-in-law of the immortal Pothooks, did not quite apprehend your meaning. Long years of obscurity and neglect have made him rather touchy.’

Mr Maresnest walked rapidly round the room, looking at the furniture, after this speech, followed by young Johnson. Mrs Moleskin and Miss Maresnest stood together on one side, and Tom took a pipe from his pocket and filled it with tobacco.

‘Light, Nancy,’ said Tom to his wife; and when Mrs Moleskin brought it to him, he lighted his pipe and smoked rather sulkily.

‘A pretty game’s been going on all this blessed dinner-time,’ he remarked, in a grumbling tone. ‘People walking about the room as if it was the Crystal Palace; people wanting to read poetry at me; people wanting to take pictures; and now I’m to lose half a day’s work, and perhaps get the sack! I put it to you, sir,’ he called out to Mr Maresnest, ‘I put it to any man! I’m a working-man; I go to work at six in the morning——’

‘I can quite understand your feelings,’ replied Mr Maresnest, advancing to Tom; ‘but be under no concern. Is this apartment in the same state as when he left it?’ he added, glancing eagerly round the room.

‘Who left it?’ asked Tom, sullenly.

‘The immortal Pothooks, of course. Do be careful,’ said young Johnson, prompting Tom Moleskin.

‘Pothooks—the immortal Pothooks!’ continued Mr Maresnest.

‘No,’ said Tom, ‘it was precious dirty when he left.’

Young Johnson gave Tom a nudge.

‘Sir?’ said Mr Maresnest.

‘I’ve had it whitewashed,’ returned Tom, loudly, ‘and put on another paper.’

‘Oh, but you shouldn’t have done that!’ replied Mr Maresnest, excitedly.

Young Johnson fidgeted about the room.

‘How d’ye mean?’ asked Tom, still sucking his pipe.

‘Why—why,’ answered Mr Maresnest, hastily, ‘there may have been some very valuable writing on the wall!’

‘Oh, no,’ continued Tom, chuckling in a peculiar and confident manner, ‘he couldn’t write.’

‘What!’ exclaimed Mr Maresnest in astonishment.

‘Do think of the immortal Pothooks, not the last tenant!’ whispered young Johnson, addressing Tom, excitedly. ‘Pothooks—the immortal Pothooks we’re speaking of.’

‘But I took the place of old dirty Pothooks,’ answered Tom, whispering to young Johnson in his turn.

‘Yes, yes!’ continued young Johnson, impatiently. ‘It is very true, sir,’ he added, addressing Mr Maresnest, ‘that during the latter years of the supposed immortal Pothook’s life he could *not* write; of course, I speak of penmanship, and not of composition; his fertile mind was as full of vigour and fancy as ever, but the feeble hand refused to obey its dictates, and he had to employ a copying-clerk when the inspiration was on him.’

‘Good gracious!’ returned Mr Maresnest, ‘what an interesting literary fact! When did this weakness come upon him?—as near as you can guess, now?’

‘Well,’ said young Johnson, appearing to consult Tom, ‘we should say about—about 1810.’

‘Or twenty,’ added Tom.

‘Ah!’ replied Mr Maresnest, chuckling with satisfaction, ‘that destroys all the autographs after that date. Little Button’s letters that he prized so, then, are only waste-paper.’

‘No doubt of it, sir,’ remarked young Johnson.

‘Have you made any other alterations?’ asked Mr Maresnest, addressing Tom, and again glancing round the room.

‘Yes,’ said Tom, ‘altered the chimley.’

‘Why?’

‘’Cos it smoked.’

Young Johnson again nudged Tom.

‘Dear, dear!’ exclaimed Mr Maresnest, piteously, ‘you shouldn’t

have done that. It's the most interesting spot in the house. He wrote a poem on it !'

'Now, look here,' said Tom, doggedly, 'I'm a working-man ! I go to work at six in the morning——'

'Do be careful, Tom,' again whispered young Johnson, 'you're breaking out again.'

'I don't care,' said Tom, sulkily ; 'is this my house, or is it not ?'

'I must preserve this sacred edifice from further desecration,' remarked Mr Maresnest, speaking to himself ; 'it is a duty I owe to society.'

'My respected supposed uncle, here, sir,' continued young Johnson, addressing Mr Maresnest, 'has much of the dogged honesty which distinguished his reputed illustrious connection—the great Pothooks. He means well, but he is rather blunt in expressing himself.'

'I can understand and appreciate that character,' said Mr Maresnest. 'But,' he added, addressing Tom, 'you can give me most interesting information about your immortal father-in-law. What were his habits generally ?'

'The old gent wants to hear about my father-in-law, now,' said Tom to himself, 'as well as old Pothooks. These people are not at all curious—oh, no ! My father-in-law ?' he added, addressing Mr Maresnest ; 'oh, he used to play a good deal at skittles.'

'Bless my heart !' exclaimed Mr Maresnest, astonished ; 'is it possible ?'

'Ah ! I believe you,' continued Tom, warming up a little ; 'and if he couldn't bring 'em down, I don't know who could.'

'No doubt that illustrious man excelled even at skittles, as he did at everything else. Go on ; you interest me strangely. Was he regular in his ways ?'

'He used to get drunk every Saturday night.'

'Dear, dear !' exclaimed Mr Maresnest ; 'the wanderings of a man of genius !'

'Yes,' said Tom, 'and we had no end o' trouble to get him to bed.'

'Ah !' remarked Mr Maresnest, 'his mighty intellect, fired by drink, refused to submit to the ordinary trammels and restrictions of domestic prudence.'

'Very likely, sir,' said Tom ; 'he nearly set the house o' fire.'

'This house ?' exclaimed Mr Maresnest, very much startled.

'Yes,' answered Tom ; 'any house ; it didn't matter to him.'

‘What an awful picture!’ continued Mr Maresnest, musingly. ‘Pothooks and his birthplace consumed in one funeral pyre!’

‘Then he used to get the blue-devils of a morning,’ returned Tom, ‘and want to cut his throat—stupid old fool!’

‘Dear, dear! what a heart-rending picture! Did he seem to labour much at his works?’

‘What works? the gas-works?’

‘No, no; his writing—his composition?’

‘Oh! bless you, no; he never went to work afore Wednesday.’

‘Was his appetite pretty good?’ continued Mr Maresnest.

‘I should think it was,’ answered Tom Moleskin, laughing. ‘Here, Nancy,’ he added, addressing his wife, ‘how about father’s appetite? It wasn’t particularly delicate, was it?’

‘Not very, Tom,’ answered Mrs Moleskin, laughing, and advancing with Miss Maresnest and young Johnson.

‘He used to punish a leg o’ mutton, eh?’ asked Tom.

‘Rather, Tom,’ answered Mrs Moleskin, still laughing. Young Johnson again nudged Tom, and warned him quietly to be careful.

‘I dare say you can answer me one question that will settle a very curious point,’ continued Mr Maresnest. ‘Was your illustrious father ever in Australia?’

‘Was he, Nancy?’ asked Tom, addressing his wife.

‘No, never out of England,’ answered Mrs Moleskin.

‘Never out o’ England at all,’ continued Tom.

‘Very remarkable, indeed,’ exclaimed Mr Maresnest; ‘wonderful!’

‘I know another man,’ said Tom, smoking his pipe, ‘who was never out o’ England.’

‘You know that passage in his poems which has been debated so much? How does it go? My memory’s not very good.’

‘What game’s up now?’ remarked Tom to himself. ‘Can’t say I do,’ he added, aloud.

Young Johnson and Mrs Moleskin walked back to the table.

‘Do you mean in the “Ode to Apoplexy,” papa?’ asked Miss Maresnest, stepping forward.

‘Blest if I don’t think they’re all rather cranky,’ again remarked Tom to himself, as he looked on astonished.

‘No,’ returned Mr Maresnest, ‘in the minor poems. Hum! I’ve got it on the tip of my tongue, too.’

‘Oh! I know, papa,’ answered Miss Maresnest, ‘it goes—

“But my heart is in the wild Australian woodlands,
With the gum-tree and the bounding kangaroo.”’

‘Exactly!’ exclaimed Mr Maresnest, delightedly, ‘that’s it! “With the gum-tree and the bounding kangaroo.” What a remarkable local colouring is thrown over that passage! It’s perfect! The “gum-tree,” and we know that he was never in Australia! And the “bounding kangaroo,” too; how natural! Observe the “bounding,”’ he continued, giving a most absurd pantomimic imitation of what he considered to be the chief moving characteristic of the animal described.

Tom followed these motions with unconcealed wonder depicted in his stolid face; Mrs Moleskin fairly burst out laughing, and young Johnson tried to stop her mouth with her apron.

‘Why, the old gent’s worse than the young ’un,’ said Tom; ‘he’s as mad as a March hare!’

‘True, sir,’ observed young Johnson, advancing to Mr Maresnest, and leaving Mrs Moleskin at the table; ‘if my supposed illustrious grandfather on the mother’s side had written nothing but that one simple poem, it would have stamped him as a man of genius!’

‘Nobly observed, young gentleman,’ returned Mr Maresnest, approvingly. ‘I’m glad to find that you appreciate the beauties of the great Pothooks. You show a taste and discernment above your years’

‘Well,’ said Tom to himself, with an inward chuckle, ‘blest if ever I could see any beauty in Pothooks.’

At this juncture, a muffled noise was heard in the side room, where the two photographic artists had retired some little time before.

‘Halloo there!’ shouted Tom, ‘what game d’ye call that?’ and he rushed to see what the noise was about, followed by Mrs Moleskin.

‘I have deeply studied him, sir,’ continued young Johnson, addressing Mr Maresnest, as though there had been no interruption, ‘not because he was a reputed relative, but because he was a true poet.’

‘Very nicely observed,’ remarked Mr Maresnest. ‘Don’t you think so?’ he added, turning to Miss Maresnest.

‘Oh! yes, papa,’ returned that young lady, impressively.

‘I am glad, sir, to perceive,’ continued Mr Maresnest, addressing young Johnson, ‘that you have become imbued with some portion of the spirit which hovers about these walls.’

‘If the mantle of the immortal Pothooks has not fallen upon me,’ answered young Johnson, ‘in all its solid reality, I am proud and happy to say that I have received at least its shadow.’

After young Johnson had delivered this high-flown speech, in a melancholy tone, he walked to another part of the room.

‘A relative,’ said Mr Maresnest to himself, looking at young

Johnson; 'youthful, with some share of the genius of the immortal Pothooks! Why should I hesitate? I might become the grandfather of a Pothooks! It is a duty that I owe to society. Emma!' he added, speaking to Miss Maresnest.

'Yes, papa,' readily answered that young lady.

'You've always been a sensible girl—thanks to my teaching—with a sympathy for genius, in whatever form it presents itself.'

'Now it's coming,' said Miss Maresnest to herself. 'Yes, papa,' she added, aloud.

'Could you, from a high sense of literary duty,' asked Mr Maresnest, 'devote yourself to that worthy grandson of the immortal Pothooks—become his wife?'

'Well, papa,' said Miss Maresnest, blushing, 'from a sense of the duty I owe to society, I think I could.'

'Noble, disinterested child!' exclaimed Mr Maresnest. 'Ah—young man,' he added, calling to young Johnson, who came forward, 'take my daughter and confer upon her the distinction of being united to a descendant of the immortal Pothooks.'

'Thanks, generous benefactor!' replied young Johnson.

At this interesting moment a smashing of glass was heard, and the two photographic artists rolled out of the side room into the sitting-room, followed by Tom and Mrs Moleskin.

'What the deuce d'ye mean by fighting in my rooms, disturbing the pigeons, and smashing the glass in that way?' shouted Tom, in a rage. 'Is this my house, or is it not?'

The quarrel still continued between the rival artists, and Tom seized one of the photographic machines.

'Come out o' that,' he shouted, addressing the two men, 'or I'll knock you down with this machine. Who's going to pay me for my fourteen squares o' glass?'

The men took no notice of Tom, but still continued their quarrel; so he stripped off his jacket, and hustled them both out of the door.

'I've stood this quite long enough,' said Tom, 'so here goes;' and as he said this, he threw one of the photographic machines through the window into the street.

'Halloo!' said a rather thick, hoarse voice outside, 'what are you up to? Pitching the bedstead out o' window?'

'Halloo!' said Tom, looking out. 'Why, blest if there ain't old Pothooks,' he added, turning to Mr Maresnest, 'and I've half smashed him!'

'Pothooks!' exclaimed the old gentleman.

‘Yes, Pothooks,’ answered Tom; ‘he comes here nearly every day, and generally drunk.’

While they were speaking, a rough-looking, middle-aged man, with filmy eyes and a red nose, entered the room. His boots were very muddy, his clothes rather ragged, and his face very dirty. His necktie was very loose, and he carried a short pipe in his hands. He was half tipsy.

‘Thomas Moleskin,’ observed this new visitor, slowly, taking off an old smashed hat, and looking at it leisurely, ‘is this using an old friend well?’

‘How did I know you was under the window?’ returned Tom.

‘Who is this person,’ said Mr Maresnest, addressing Tom, ‘who bears the remarkable name of Pothooks?’

‘Who? why, Pothooks himself, of course!’

‘This can’t be the immortal Pothooks?’

‘Whoever said he was?’ answered Tom. ‘You’re not the immortal Pothooks,’ he added, addressing the dirty visitor, ‘are you, Jack?’

‘Immor’al Pothooks?’ said the dirty visitor, slowly, ‘oh, no!’

‘You never wrote no poetry stuff,’ asked Tom, ‘nor anything o’ that sort, did you, Jack.’

‘Bless you, Tom,’ replied the dirty visitor, slowly, and in a pathetic tone, ‘I wouldn’t do anything o’ the sort for the world!’

‘No!’ said Tom.

‘No!’ said the dirty visitor.

‘Well,’ said Mr Maresnest, ‘but there must be some gross imposition here!’

‘Now, look here!’ said Tom; ‘I’ve heard a good deal about a man called the immortal Pothooks. I don’t know him, and never said I did. This is *my* Pothooks—the mortal Pothooks. P’raps he was born here, p’raps he wasn’t. That’s about it, I think,’ he added, addressing the dirty visitor; ‘eh, Jack?’

‘Quite right, Tom,’ said the dirty visitor; ‘my sen’iments exactly.’

‘Then we have still to search for the birthplace of the immortal Pothooks,’ said Mr Maresnest, much crestfallen, ‘and I have given my daughter to—’

‘A very good husband,’ said young Johnson, confidently advancing, ‘although not bearing the remarkable name of Pothooks.’

‘No, thank goodness!’ said Miss Maresnest, to herself.

‘Now, look here!’ said Tom Moleskin, ‘I’m a working-man—’

‘Yes, yes,’ returned Mr Maresnest, pettishly, ‘we know all that; but where’s the birthplace of the immortal Pothooks?’

‘How should I know?’ said Tom Moleskin. ‘I put it to you as a man—I put it to any man—is this my house, or is it not? Whether Pothooks was born here or not, it doesn’t much matter; for while I’m the party here, you look in at any time, and there’s always a knife and fork for you.’

AN ADVERTISING MEDIUM.



HAD a carriage to myself at starting. I looked up to the roof, and carried my eye along the walls of my prison. There were all my old tormentors. Doo Babby’s Delicious Prevalenta—Epileptic Collars—No more Red Hair—The Registered Hottentôt—Pannas Cornium Boots—Emollio Coddle Soap—Supernatural Sherry—Fine Old Booby Port—and Sauce of Prunella of the venerable Gravesend. We stopped at a small station, and by the aid of one lamp flickering in the night breeze I saw in gigantic letters on the walls the eternal waterproof Zephyr Garment and Paradise Shirt! I turned for relief to my ‘Railway Literature,’ and finding a thin strip of intellectual food done up between two thick slices of advertisement, I was seized with weariness and could not read. Shirts, sherries, soaps, boots, and wigs, were all swimming away in the glimmer of my solitary lamp, as the door opened, and something like a man encumbered with capes and rugs, portmanteaus, umbrellas, and walking-sticks, stepped in, and settled into the corner opposite.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said he, ‘but have you any objection to my smoking a pipe of the Patent Pectoral Cough Mixture, Six Shillings a Pound?’

I did not object, but hinted that ‘Bye Laws’ were strict. He took off his travelling cap, which served at the same time as a tobacco-pouch, and to my astonishment, I perceived that while one-half of his hair was a raven black the other was totally gray. My scrutiny attracted his attention.

‘You are struck by the peculiar appearance of my hair,’ he observed, filling the bowl of an earthenware pipe with the Pectoral Cough Mixture; ‘is it possible that you do not know me? My name is Posters, the inventor of Advertising Media.’

‘Oh!’ I replied.

‘You remember the celebrated “Commercial Shirt,”’ he continued; ‘Six for Forty Shillings? You have one on now. That shirt, sir, was mine!’

‘Is it possible!’ I exclaimed.

‘Yes,’ he continued in a musing tone, ‘it was a beautiful idea, it combined at once neatness with utility.’

‘Not being a commercial man,’ I observed, becoming interested, ‘I may, perhaps, be pardoned my ignorance; but I may inquire what peculiarity distinguished your invention from other shirts?’

‘Certainly,’ he rapidly rejoined. ‘It was what is called an “illustrated” shirt, and to adapt it for the mercantile classes, instead of the unmeaning and gaudy designs which this kind of vestment usually presents, my invention had a complete set of interest tables running up and down the front, calculating ten pounds to a thousand, from one day to twelve months, at five per cent., and presenting an appearance, as I before observed, at once eminently neat and practically useful.’

‘Were you rewarded for your ingenuity?’ I inquired.

‘To my utmost wishes,’ he replied. ‘No amount of manufacturing activity could supply it fast enough. I think I made the remark at the time, in some of the public prints, that “no merchant should be without it! It should be on every banker’s back!”’

‘Bless me!’ I remarked, not knowing what else to say. ‘You *must* have been a happy man?’

‘No, sir, far from it. I had a rival. A despicable imitator. My novelties were, of course, registered, and could not be infringed, but the poor, barren wretch, trod as closely upon the borders of my ideas as the law would permit him, and produced—What, think you?’

‘A registered Ready Reckoner?’ I suggested.

‘No, sir, an Almanack Shirt for the current year! I now engaged with my antagonist in a fierce struggle for advertising pre-eminence. His activity was great, and so was mine. I bought the right of obtaining publicity in all the omnibuses; he secured all the turnpikes. He was before me with the steam-boat piers; but I succeeded in buying up all the bridges. He defeated me, however, on the railroads.’

‘Did he?’ I said.

‘Yes, sir, he did. With humiliation I confess it. I overlooked the importance of the railway carriage as an advertising medium, and my opponent obtained the monopoly of all the leading lines. This was a great blow to me. Night after night did I consume the mid-

night oil—the best colza oil, eight shillings a gallon—trying to hit upon a plan for obtaining a greater publicity at a smaller cost.’

‘Did you succeed?’ I inquired.

‘I did,’ he replied. ‘My labour and patience were rewarded with an inspiration! I had it!—Yes, sir; was it not a sublime idea? I would stamp every coin which came, or could be brought, into my possession, and would send them forth again into the world to trumpet my garment from the Land’s End to the Orkneys.’

Here my excited companion, having finished his narrative, applied himself to his pipe with great vehemence.

‘Yours is, indeed,’ I observed, ‘a strange and interesting account of commercial enterprise and vicissitudes. Will you consider me impertinent in asking if the public is indebted to you for any of the popular articles of the present day:—“The Shirt of Paradise,” “The Rose-water Sniphonia,” “The Incometaxridian Trouser,” or any other trade riddle of London?’

‘It is not,’ he replied. ‘All my talent and energy are now devoted to the cultivation of the science of advertising for the benefit of enterprising and “registering” traders.’

‘It is a science,’ I remarked, ‘without doubt.’

‘It is,’ he replied, ‘a wonderful—a noble science. It is the Jesuitism of the nineteenth century; and I may remark to you, in confidence, that you behold before you the Loyola of the system! If your own father approves of the marmalade, or the potted anchovies, at your breakfast table, take his opinion with care: I do not say he *is*, but he *may* be one of my emissaries!’

‘This is a tremendous power to wield, sir!’ I said.

‘It is. We have our training college, from which the youth of both sexes—and even children—are sent into the world to act their part in this wonderful system. In no society are you free from it. It penetrates into the palace and the cottage; the haunts of pleasure and the marts of business.’

‘Is it possible?’ I said. ‘You amaze me!’

‘I,’ he continued, ‘am the great archetype of my class—the class of my creation—the living, moving, ubiquitous, advertising medium. My free conversation with you is a luxury I have not indulged in for years. My speech is studiously framed to introduce into notice each and every article which trading ingenuity wishes to force into public estimation.’

At this juncture of my fellow-traveller’s discourse, I felt a sharp sensation of pain where I was sitting, as if several pins were pricking

me. I made an involuntary movement which at once attracted the attention of my companion.

‘Ah!’ he quietly observed, ‘I know the cause; it is my “Placard Indicator,”—you turn, of course, to examine the seat.’

I naturally did so, before he directed me, and found several small, sharp, projecting pegs, each surrounded by an adhesive ticket exhorting me to buy the Ointment of the Druids, sold in boxes at three and sixpence!

‘Another of my inventions, sir,’ he observed, ‘for stimulating the attention and directing the public eye to what would otherwise be an unfavourable position for an advertisement.—A trifle thrown off in a happy moment.’

I resumed my seat in silence, taking the precaution to cover the ‘Placard Indicator’ with the substantial folds of my railway rug. My companion coolly continued as if nothing had happened.

‘If there is one branch of my profession that I pursue with enthusiasm, it is the organization of introductions.’

‘What may that be?’ I inquired.

‘It is the bringing together of persons,’ he replied, ‘who require a little assistance in the way of publicity. It is the marriage of Advertising. A most interesting case of this description lately came under my management—quite a love match, sir, I assure you. The contracting parties were M. Alexis Top Sawyer the celebrated cook, and Highson jun., the “importer of colonial produce.” The one has a cheap cooking-book to sell; the other a peculiarly fragrant coffee. Top Sawyer states in his volume that having purchased a canister of Highson Junior’s “Patent Aromatic Coffee, roasted by steam power,” &c. &c., he was delighted to find upon testing it that it far surpassed any coffee that he had ever tasted! He had been, he said, in the cafés of Germany and France, the luxurious divans of Stamboul and sunny Italy, but never had his fastidious and highly-trained palate been so gratified as by the inimitable coffee of Highson Junior, sold in canisters at one and sixpence. On the other hand, Highson Junior has read Top Sawyer’s book with a degree of pleasure he can hardly find words to express. Here indeed is a benefactor to his species. No longer is there any reason why the savoury ragoût and the delicate omelette should continue to be strangers at the board of the humble classes. Ude, Kitchener, Acton, were all very well in their way; but they addressed themselves exclusively to the aristocracy. Top Sawyer is pre-eminently the cook of the people. So impressed is the enterprising Highson with these facts that, rather than Top Sawyer’s

book should be restricted in its circulation, he himself would give a free copy to every purchaser of—say six pounds of the steam-roasted coffee in canisters at one shilling and sixpence. Isn't this delightful, sir, isn't it human nature?'

'It is, indeed,' I meekly replied, beginning to have a very poor opinion of my fellow-creatures.

'To return to myself,' continued my companion, 'what I appear to you mentally and morally, that also am I physically,—an Advertising Medium.

'I appear in nothing, I possess nothing, but what has a purpose—the dissemination of commercial ideas. You observed the extraordinary appearance of my hair—one half gray, the other jet black. Time turned it gray, the "Timbuctoo Lotion" made it what it is. Allow me to present you with a card of particulars. My teeth are false, patent registered; with a lever movement, compensation balance, jewelled in eight holes.'

To my surprise, while he spoke, he wrenched the whole set out of his jaws, passed them rapidly before me, and deposited them upon the seat beside him.

'False teeth,' he calmly continued, 'possess this advantage at the dinner table: they do not impose upon their owner the necessity of picking them. You simply unscrew the set, hand them to the servant, who removes all stringy impediments, and returns them to you fresh cleansed for the second course. I have much pleasure in introducing you to the maker. Take a card. My eyes, sir, are equally false, and equally good.'

He 'gouged' them out for my inspection! I made a side movement towards the door, and had thoughts of casting myself from the carriage. There were the two eyes glaring at me from the floor, and the 'Medium' sitting before me with empty sockets!

'They are also a patent article,' he continued in a tone grown more sepulchral, 'take a card. Do you use artificial flesh?' he inquired, picking a handful out of his cheek, and pulling off his nose, like a pantomimic mask. 'It is exceedingly warm and comfortable to wear, and always preserves the freshness of youth. Try this specimen; it is beautifully soft.'

As he spoke he forced the clammy product into my reluctant hand. I looked at it for a moment with loathing not unmixed with curiosity, then returned it to my eccentric companion.

'Take a card,' said he, placing the artificial flesh on the seat by the side of the teeth, 'you may want it some day.'

He then unscrewed his left arm at the shoulder, and having taken it out of the socket, presented it tenderly to my view, as if it had been a young child.

‘It has all the latest improvements,’ he observed; ‘delicacy of touch, gracefulness, pliability, and strength. Warranted to stand any climate. The price is not unreasonable: take a card.’

How long this ghastly mode of showing ghastly samples would have continued I cannot tell, for to my great relief we were interrupted here by certain signs that our train was approaching the London terminus. This seemed to produce in the ‘medium’s’ mind a sudden recollection. He rushed to the window, dragging me after him with his one arm.

‘There!’ he exclaimed, in a tone of exultation, directing my attention to a gigantic luminous object which shone brightly through the night mist—‘look at that, and confess that human ingenuity can go no further. I having nothing greater to show you.’ He ceased; and I fixed my gaze in the direction he indicated. As we approached nearer, the luminous mass developed into St Paul’s Cathedral, with the dome rendered completely transparent, and strongly lighted from the interior, and on it in large and brilliant letters were these words, discernible for miles, ‘Try the Commercial Shirt; Six for Forty Shillings.’

While I was wrapped in mingled feelings of astonishment and admiration at this novel sight there came a crash! Whether it was coal trucks, luggage trains, collision, or what not, I cannot tell. I find myself in a bed at some hotel. I suspect I have been here some time. What seems to me very remarkable is, that when I make any inquiries respecting the strange traveller they give me something to send me to sleep!’*

PANACEAS.



F I allowed myself to write one word against the age I live in, I should be nothing better than the blackest ingrate. Few of the commonest animals in creation are without some feeling of gratitude, and shall man—superior man—admit an inferiority to the beasts that perish?

* Reprinted from the *Train Magazine*.

It is a beautiful, a generous, a wealthy, and believing age. When I hear accounts of its increase of population, I say, Go on and prosper. When I hear accounts of its increase of wealth, I likewise say, Go on and prosper. The larger and richer the field, the better will it be for the reaper.

When I look around me at the world of the present hour, I pity the condition of those of my class (the class that is too wise to steal, too clever to work, and that has intellect enough to scheme), whose misfortune it was to live in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I am filled with commiseration for my ancestors, when I think what ingenuity in those days may have been allowed to perish in silent neglect, or may have been rewarded in a very partial and inadequate manner.

I am the inventor of those three once popular names—the ‘Druids’ Ointment,’ the ‘Druids’ Lotion,’ and the ‘Druids’ Pill.’ I lived for years magnificently upon those names; I realized a handsome fortune by them; and I sold their copyright, though somewhat worn and tarnished, for a sum that would open the eyes of any plodding, every-day trader. That copyright term has expired, the names themselves have almost expired, and I am perfectly at liberty to write as I now do.

First of all, I feel it my duty to record, in the most honest and unequivocal manner, what that pill, that lotion, and that ointment really were not. The pill was not made of old leather breeches, forty years behind the fashion, which were rescued from the moths and rats of an old slopseller’s warehouse, at a nominal price per ton, and chopped and ground to powder by the aid of machinery. The pill was not made with equal mixtures of tan-dust, and gum Arabic (pronounced ‘marrowback’), and the sweepings of a saw-pit. It was not made, on any occasion during my proprietorship, with old felt hats of a past generation, discarded and ‘jobbed off’ like the aforesaid leather breeches. Of course, I am only answering for the medicine while it was in my hands, and under my management. I sold it, with all letters, testimonials, etc., on the seventeenth of July, eighteen hundred and fifty-four. What it was in substance, though still retaining the name, after that period I have no authority nor desire to state. The lotion was not a very important, or much demanded, division of my medicinal stock-in-trade, and it was not manufactured by a combination of Spanish liquorice and thin barley-water. The ointment, which stood next to the pills, and almost equalled them in its sale, was neither rejected railway-cart grease, condemned butter, nor the re-

appearance of a bankrupt pomatum-maker's stock, that had been bought for a mere trifle at the assignee's sale. Each and all of these stories about my medicines were the idle fabrications of diners-out and professional funny dogs, who often took the remedies in full faith which they openly affected to despise. So have I known many noisy sceptics with a strong and secret superstitious belief in the coarsest and vulgarest of miracles.

Having described what the pill, the ointment, and the lotion were not, I can soon state, in a very few words, what they really were. They were incapable of hurting a child. The flour which composed the pill, and the lard which composed the ointment, were the finest and purest that could be purchased in the market, while the lotion was nothing more than weak tobacco-tea, as any one ought to have discovered in a moment with the least sense of smell. A little jalap was sometimes mixed in the pills, to act as an aperient upon those whose faith required quickening.

These were slender materials, it would seem, with which to build up a fortune, and they would not have gone far without other things to help them. The first step of importance was to invent a taking title, and here I found, by experience, that I had been peculiarly happy. I sank all personal considerations, all the pleasure of being decorated with foreign orders and foreign diplomas (both of which are to be purchased in the market), all the delight of advertising my own name, and being known as the benefactor of my species. I stood, like Junius, the shadow of a shade, and gave up everything for the remote and venerable Druids. It was not De Jones's marvellous discoveries that were healing the awfulest of sore legs, purifying the most obstinately stagnant blood, and renovating the most shattered constitution. It was the pill that had been handed down from the dim old mystic days, when Stonehenge was a busy temple, and not a deserted wilderness; it was the ointment that had followed the pill, at a decent distance, and the lotion that had followed the ointment.

The next step was to impress these titles deeply in the public mind, a laborious and a costly proceeding that absorbed a considerable amount of capital. This capital was supplied by a gentleman—a kind of half banker—who had moral scruples about entering into a partnership to establish such a thing as a popular pill; but who advanced the cash as a loan transaction at a highly remunerative rate of interest. I know many fountains of capital, like this nameless gentleman, whose streams of hard money flow into many alleys and by-places, to the existence of which they profess to be utterly blind. In

sowing this large sum of golden sovereigns broadcast, it required a firm faith in the credulity of the public to feel that it would ever take root, and yield back both principal and interest. It may not be good or wise to trust princes, but, in such a case, it is good and safe to trust the public. By repeating the same assertion, boldly and unflinchingly, day by day, year by year, you will find your followers and believers gradually increased. There is hardly a ragged crossing-sweeper in the London streets—the Salt Lakes of Utah are my witnesses—who might not declare himself the resurrection and the life, if not moved on by the police, and be secure of many adherents, who could follow him to the death. As to imagination, that quality declared to be so rare by the critics, and supposed to be entirely engrossed by a few favoured professional writers, there are thousands of people in the commonplace world who are drunk and mad with it; mountains of it that have never been ascended, or taken note of; mines of it as deep as chaos, that have never been explored. Spiritualism shows us something of it. Great Easterns are built by it to be the laughing-stocks of the practical few; Suez canals are carried out under its influence; and Spring-heeled Jacks are considered by those who sit under its spirit to foreshadow the end of the world. A scarcity of imagination, forsooth! Where? There may be a scarcity of the logical faculty, a failure in the crop of common sense, but in Bedlam or out of Bedlam, in a Rotherhithe hide-warehouse or the Rainbow Library of the National Museum, imagination is as plentiful as chick-weed or table-ale. Knowing these facts and seeing these manifestations, need any man, not a fool or a coward, hesitate for a moment to cast his whole life, fate, and fortune upon the waters of popular credulity, of popular imaginative faith?

In throwing out my bait to catch the sufferings of humanity, I was careful only to angle for those that had an extremely impalpable and fanciful existence. Neither of my boasted and well-advertised panaceas professed to cure much that could be seen, could be weighed, could be measured, or could be grasped. I confined myself to such ailments as tingling of the ears, shooting of corns, twitching of the nose, tickling of the throat, fear of suffocation, flushing, blushing, hesitation, want of punctuality, and loss of energy; spasms, unstrung nerves, heaviness, sympathetic pains, lowness of spirits, want of ability to play the piano, to compose a poem; want of money to meet a bill; palpitation, shortness of breath; intellect declining from intense study (of course from nothing else), general derangement of the organic network, chagrin from having walked out in an ill-fitting

coat, or from having missed an agreeable appointment; hydrophobia, flatulency, singing in the ears, cramp in the foot, general functional and secretory affections; horror of a postman's knock, the hurdy-gurdy, the national debt, the bag-pipe or *corua musa*; want of galvanism in the gastric organs; sacerophobia, languor, irritability, tendency to smash crockery and abuse books, excitement, fear, distaste for society, want of ventilation, ignorance and impatience of taxation, envy, hatred, malice, and all tanning, redness, and dryness of the system. These were the afflictions of the human frame which I laid myself out to attack with the 'Druids' Ointment,' the 'Druids' Lotion,' and, above all, the 'Druids' Pill.' I was once nearly extending my crusade against the enemies of the hair, the whiskers, and the teeth, but I wisely abandoned this project upon maturer reflection. The list of ailments I have given above presented a field quite wide enough to be cultivated with prudence, and afforded hopeful prospects of full employment. For one man who is really seized with a serious complaint, a hundred suffer from 'lowness of spirits,' 'heaviness,' or a 'want of energy.' Though I was bold enough to lay siege to the liver with no weak or trembling hand, I found that my best policy was to cling to the vaguest manifestations of indisposition. The cure of an awful case of sore leg, which I have before alluded to, and which I paraded, perhaps unwisely, in most of my general advertisements, was a reputed triumph of some medicine, name unrecorded, which was authenticated in a letter of thanks nearly a century old, written by the patient himself, the Earl of Plumcolour. This letter was honestly bought by me at the sale of a physician's effects, and as it spoke merely of 'medicine' and 'those pills,' I had no hesitation in using it. The date was sometimes altered or modernized by the stupid printers, but that was not my fault. My panaceas professed to be strictly historical, and I felt that I had a perfect right to such an historical testimonial.

It was a difficult task this creation of testimonials, and one which had to be performed at the very outset. It divided itself into two sections; the collection of the real and local testimonials, and the composition of the sham ones. The latter was a labour requiring some literary skill, and I may be pardoned for feeling a little pride, when I say that I undertook it myself. The following are a few specimens, which I have selected with care, for the purpose of showing how works of fiction are largely used by your successful pill-sellers:—

FROM THE REV. JOHN JAMES, M.A.

*'Thorley Vicarage, Thorley-in-the-Hollow, near
Fogmoor, Dec. 3, 1846.'*

'SIR,—I should always feel that I had neglected a paramount duty, did I not hasten at once to acknowledge the benefits I have derived from your invaluable medicines. Before they were (providentially) introduced to my notice, I was a miserable man, incapable of any continuous work, either of a secular or a clerical nature. Whenever I began to eat, I felt a dryness in the throat, accompanied by shooting pains in the wrists, and a determination of blood to the head. Whenever I attempted to compose a discourse, I felt a melancholy slowness of ideas, and a sense of oppression at the chest. I am fourteen miles from a regular medical practitioner, and had not the very Rev. the Bishop of Galloway spoken to me of your remedies, I know not what would have been the result. After seven and twenty boxes of your excellent pills, I am (providentially) another man; and I look upon my flow of spirits and sense of self-reliance as something truly marvellous. I shall be in town (*D.V.*) in the spring, and will endeavour to call and thank you personally. In the mean time you have perfect liberty to use this letter in any way you may think fit.

'JOHN JAMES, M.A.'

'*P.S.*—Send me, by return, twelve more boxes of the pills, and a quart of the lotion. By rail and coach to Fogmoor, thence by carrier.'

REMARKABLE CASE.

'SIR,—Left an orphan at an early age, I committed the unspeakable folly of drinking freely at a street pump when I was hot. Well, sir, time rolled on. An arctic chilliness in winter pervaded all my limbs. The sports of childhood had no longer any attractions for me; the lessons of learning and tuition filled me with loathing and disgust. My appetite was ravenous; but what of that? Half my food seemed to go the wrong way. I was troubled with strange visions in the night, so much so that I dreaded the approach of the hour at which, by my school regulations, I was compelled to retire to my couch. I pricked a blue ink picture of an anchor and a lamp-post into my left arm, but they did not seem to afford me any relief. The crisis was approaching. One day a turncock produced a little hillock of water from a plug in the street, for purposes best known to him-

self. I danced round it like a red Indian round a stake. That night I was taken ill. I heard that it was hydrophobia!

‘I draw a veil over my sufferings. They told me I was cured by your invaluable lotion and your more invaluable pill, and I believe them. For obvious reasons, sir, I conceal my name, but I shall be happy to answer privately any questions.

‘ED—GR P—O.’

AN UNSOPHISTICATED TESTIMONIAL.

‘*The Original Rag and Bottle Warehouse,
Old Brewery Lane, Whitechapel,
March 14, 1847.*

‘RESPECTED SIR,*—Now I’m on my legs again, and all along of you, I hope that no offence will be taken if I do the thing that’s right. I might have been cold meat, if it hadn’t been for your pills; and all I can say is, here’s to you and the Druids in any kind of sociable drink. I don’t know who the last gentlemen may be, but they’ve done me a power of good. If it hadn’t been for them, I might have gone on giving the fullest price for all kinds of kitchen stuff, until I was brought to the workhouse and the grave. But no says your pills, and cures me of delirium tremens before I could smash a wine-bottle. We’ve also cured our baby with the ointment; and we’re going to have a few friends to-night, to drown it in the bowl. You may fancy I’m looking towards you, about half after nine.

‘Your grateful servant,
‘JOSEPH RICKETTS.’

FROM A HAPPY FAMILY.

‘*Warren Lodge, Upper Breedham, Suffolk,
May 21, 1848.*

‘GENTLEMEN,—I have now taken your invaluable medicine for nearly fifty years, and I fearlessly pronounce it to be the best blood purifier and life regenerator ever produced. My wife has taken it for about the same period, and she joins me in this testimony. My children (I possess nineteen) have taken it with the most beneficial effects, from as early an age as four days old, and they also join me in this testimony. My servants take it of their own free will, and I have been the happy means of introducing it very largely to my tenants.

* The style of this letter has been retained, but the spelling has been altered and improved.

It is no uncommon thing to see our family-circle watching as anxiously for our monthly parcel of pills and ointment, as if it contained the choicest sweetmeats. I have no hesitation in saying that no household can be worthy of the name of an English home unless its chief members always keep it supplied with your invaluable remedies. I should not feel happy, I could not resign myself to rest at night, unless your old familiar boxes and bottles were standing on my dressing-table. Oh, sir, words are too feeble to express all that we owe to you! May you never be reduced to the necessity of taking your own medicines, is the sincere wish and prayer of

‘GEORGE WARREN.’

*(Here follow the signatures of Mrs Warren
and the nineteen children.)*

A BUSINESS TESTIMONIAL.

‘14, Bolt Court, Mincemeat Lane,
Sept. 26, 1849.

‘SIR,—Your pills of 21st inst. are to hand, and in reply beg to state have given much satisfaction.—Your respy.,

‘WILLIAM SHARP.’

AN OFFICIAL TESTIMONIAL.

(Translation.)

‘Junglbagdoor, Nov. 13, 1849.

‘SIR,—I am directed by His Highness Jamjelly Hobbardehoy, to state that he has derived much benefit from your excellent medicine. Neither the pills, the ointment, or the lotion were in the least degree damaged by the violent change of climate.

‘COOLEY CAWABS,

‘*Private Secretary to His Highness.*’

A BLUFF BUT HONEST TESTIMONIAL.

‘SIR,—If any man had told me twelve months ago that I should one day be writing a testimonial for a patent medicine, he would have found himself lying on his back before he knew where he was. I don’t like writing, much less writing about physic; but you have a claim upon me, and no man who has a claim upon Joe Rumble shall ever say it wasn’t paid.

‘I was off my feed; there’s no mistake about that. Fresh air

isn't everything. A man who's off his feed had better make room for somebody else. To make a long story short, you put me on my feed again; and here's your letter to do what you like with.

‘JOE RUMBLE.

‘*Sayers' Mills, near Four Oaks, Kent.*’

A DELICATE TESTIMONIAL.

‘SIR,—You will pardon the liberty I take as a lady and a stranger in addressing to you a few lines; but in so doing I am only fulfilling the last wish of a beloved friend, who, alas! has now gone to that “bourne from whence no traveller returns.” If you could have seen her emaciated frame before she was induced to try your miraculous medicines, even you, sir, would have despaired of producing any relief. We are fearfully, we are wonderfully made! She took them, and what was the result? A gradual restoration to those greatest of all blessings, health, and (comparative) strength. She left them off, alas! by the advice of her prejudiced physician, whom I will not name, and what was the result? My poor friend sank slowly, step by step, until the lamp of life—if I may be allowed the expression—flickered in the socket, and finally—alas! too finally—expired. It was a curious and affecting wish, but she desired to be buried with the last neglected bottle of your ointment [*sic* in ms.] by her side, and I need hardly say that that wish was fully gratified. I have now performed my melancholy task; and I hasten to lay down the pen. Though I have lost a friend, I have gained a knowledge of an invaluable medicine, which cannot prove otherwise than useful to me, wherever my lot may be cast.

‘LUCY CROAKER.

‘*Hartful Lodge, St John's Wood.*’

REMARKABLE CASE OF LONGEVITY.

(*From the Cowshead Guardian.*)

‘August 4, 1853.

‘Biddy Crumble, familiarly known as “Biddy Harelip,” the oldest woman in Sowash, and, in fact, in all Essex, expired on Thursday last at the very remarkable and advanced age of one hundred and twenty-four. She remembered distinctly the incorporation of the Glaziers' Company, the foundation of the Marischal College, the invention of Napier's Bones; and she has often heard her grand-

father speak of the great consternation which was felt throughout the country when it was rumoured that Julius Cæsar had landed in the character of an invader. She preserved her good humour and faculties to the last, a fact which may be attributed to her constant habit of taking the celebrated 'Druids' Pills,'—a box of which was her faithful companion night and day.'

The other portion of my testimonial business, the collection of real and local letters of thanks, was intimately connected with the appointment of agents. In organizing this part of the system, I was compelled, in some degree, to run on the lines laid down by my predecessors. The rule, when engaging an agent (generally a chemist), was to stipulate that he should find a certain number of real and fabricated testimonials every year, and should answer all letters of inquiry, if necessary, respecting those testimonials. A sharp and clever agent would often obtain letters from very respectable people, by persuading them that the medicines had really done them considerable good. When very respectable people were scarce for this purpose, the same active and intelligent agent was not to be foiled. A credulous or impressionable old housekeeper or cook at a neighbouring mansion would often develop, by proper treatment, into a highly imposing referee. The first thing to do was to give or sell this old woman a box of the famous pills; the next, to convince her that they had saved her from the grave; and the next, to get her to sign a letter, written by the agent, stating very earnestly that such was her firm belief. The general readers of this letter, when it is published to the world as a favourable testimonial, never doubt but what 'Mrs Scullery, of Portico Hall,' is the distinguished mistress of the mansion. Any letters that may arise from scribbling and inquiring sceptics are, of course, taken in, carried by Mrs Scullery in fear and bewilderment to the active and intelligent agent, and answered by that invaluable man in the most prompt and satisfactory manner. What has been done for pills, lotions, and ointments in this way can hardly be calculated.

Sometimes the most rapturous letters of gratitude poured in spontaneously upon my different agents, especially after my vigorous advertising had caused the panaceas to strike root in the public mind. On one occasion, an agent himself was positively bitten with a belief in these medicines, and was moved to preach of their virtues like an inspired prophet, the only difficulty being to keep his enthusiasm within reasonable bounds. As I before observed, there is no lack of imagination in the commonplace world.

Of my advertising system, it is hardly necessary for me to speak at great length. Everybody knows how the art of attaining publicity has developed within the last twenty years, though few persons will venture to predict the height it may attain in ten, fifteen, or twenty years to come. Some of our public buildings—not all—still sullenly refuse the tempting advances of the trading throng, but if they are cursed with the dangerous gifts of eligibility and position, it is almost certain that one day they must yield and fall. We shall rise up some morning in the clear summer air, and find that the bill-sticker's defiling hand has been busy upon the sacred, gloomy dome of Saint Paul's.

Of course, I employed people to speak carelessly but favourably of my panaceas in the bosom of society; engaged house-walls; occupied railway carriages and other public vehicles; hastened to secure favourable advertising positions in magazines and newspapers; and did all that every energetic advertiser is still doing, or has done before. I called art to my aid, and had an oil-painting, with countless engravings of the venerable Druid, Alceazar, the traditional discoverer of the medicines supposed to have descended to me. I beckoned to literature, and she obeyed my summons, by producing part of an historical novellette, whose chief design was to push the sale of the lotion, the ointment, and the pill. The author went on very well for about a dozen chapters, all introductory, and all discursive; but when he came to the interesting point, where Alceazar, the Druid, was represented gathering herbs on the exact spot where Salisbury Cathedral now stands, he unaccountably broke down. I know I could have done it better myself, if my business labours had only spared me the time. There were huge lumps of Ossian stuck in it, as large as a child's head.

The advertisements that were drawn up by my own hand were always turned, so I flatter myself, with some point and skill. A few short specimens may not be uninteresting:—

‘THE PLEASURES OF THE TABLE.—Why should any man be debarred from partaking freely of those dishes which wealth or hospitality has placed before him? How many thousands—nay, millions—live in a Tantalus-state of existence, seeing a tempting panorama of food passing before them which they dare not touch, or touch only to suffer from giddiness, flushings, and pains in the back? All this is remedied by the “Druids’ Pill,” the “Druids’ Ointment,” and the “Druids’ Lotion.” Sold in boxes at 4s. 6d., 10s. 9d., and one guinea; and bottles at 18s., 35s., and 52s. *N.B.*—A considerable saving is effected by taking the larger quantities.’

‘THE WHITLOW SEASON.—Beware of this stealthy and dangerous complaint, which comes upon you like an avalanche. No one is free from it, the infant in the cradle, the strong man on the mountain top, especially during the Asiatic months. The only safeguards are the “Druids’ Pills,” the “Druids’ Ointment,” and the “Druids’ Lotion.” Sold in boxes at 4s. 6d., 10s. 9d., and one guinea; and bottles at 18s., 35s., and 52s. *N.B.*—A considerable saving is effected by taking the larger quantities.’

‘SOCIETY, HOPE.—No victims of unstrung nerves, heaviness, or tingling of the ears; no melancholy martyrs to tickling in the throat, hesitation, or languor, need any longer be self-banished outcasts from that SOCIETY they are so eminently fitted to adorn. There is HOPE and a certain remedy in the “Druids’ Pill,” the “Druids’ Ointment,” and the “Druids’ Lotion.” Sold in boxes at 4s. 6d., 10s. 9d., and one guinea; and bottles at 18s., 35s., and 52s. *N.B.*—A considerable saving is effected by taking the larger quantities.’

It must not be supposed from all this that my business-life was one of roses. I had my difficulties to contend with. Some of my agents and testimonial-makers took advantage of me, or tried to do so, as witness the following letter from one of my chief provincial stations :—

‘*Leepool, Dec. 28, 1853.*

‘DEAR SIR,—As the end of the year approaches, I feel it impossible to go on any longer at my present salary. I have borne every disease you put upon me, and the consequence is, I am now being shown up in the “Daily Cherubim,” one of our local papers. I copy an epigram which appeared last Saturday in the “Poet’s Corner.” (We ought to have advertised in that paper) :—

“EPIGRAM

On Mr J——s R—b—y,
Agent for the ‘Druids’ Pill,’ etc.

“Affliction sore long time he bore,
And suffered not in vain,
Till Puffaway reduced his pay,
Which eased him of his pain.”

Besides this, the letters inquiring about the “testimonials” are so numerous, that I shall have to get a boy to answer them; and, taking

all things into consideration, I don't see my way clear under a hundred a year *for life*.

‘JAMES RUBY.’

I did not comply with the demands of this letter, and many like it, by return of post, and it was fortunate that I acted as I did. The pill, the ointment, and the lotion received a shock, a few days afterwards, from which they never wholly recovered. The popular imagination and credulity that had helped me to my success were equally ready to turn against me. I am not surprised at this. When mobs are logical the millennium may be considered as ushered in.

It was shortly after Christmas that an old gentleman was found dead in an easy-chair. He was a short, stout man, a free-living man, —a man who abhorred exercise, and loved sleep. He had evidently been a good customer or patient of mine, for he was literally surrounded by the united panaceas, and the Druids' pill-box was lying open on a table near his hand. Reason pointed to apoplexy, but popular feeling connected his death in some way with the united panaceas. A thorough investigation failed to remove this besotted impression, and my medicinal property was enormously injured. I never attempt to argue with an excited crowd. Upon counting up my gains, I found I had done very well; and I therefore disposed of the injured copyright in the united panaceas to the first daring speculator who offered me a reasonable price.

SAWDUST PILLS.



IN a local newspaper, which I am rather fond of reading, I often see the following tempting advertisement:—

‘SAWDUST GRATIS.

‘1000 sacks to be given away: apply at the saw-mills ——’

Most persons of an inventive turn of mind, who frequently read this announcement, would naturally tax their brains to discover what use they could make of sawdust. There is such a charm in getting a thousand sacks of anything, not absolutely offensive, for nothing, that many people have doubtless obtained a quantity of this sawdust with an idea that, like all bargains, it will come in handy at some period. To these people I venture to throw out a valuable suggestion. As

dolls are often stuffed with this economical material, why should not the human doll be filled with it? There are two ways of doing this—in food and in physic; but as the human doll is ten times as fastidious about the first as he is about the second, I propose to cram him with this sawdust in the shape of pills.

The first thing required in this sawdust pill will be a good name, and that can be obtained from any literary gentleman who is clever in inventing titles. The next thing will be the command of capital—from ten to twenty thousand pounds; and courage to scatter it broadcast in advertising this title. Put your trust in the credulity of the great Anglo-Saxon race, and it will never deceive you. No man amongst those leviathan quacks, who spend their thirty thousand pounds per annum in advertisements, ever had cause to complain of the intelligence of the public. They planted the titles of their nostrums years ago in the popular mind, and their businesses now go on like an excellent clock, which only requires an occasional inspection.

In mixing your sawdust pills, you will require one ingredient that can make its presence felt to the believing nostrum taker, and gamboge is the cheapest and most effective substance for your purpose. ‘Testimonials’ will be required to back up your advertisements, and these you will have to procure from some ‘literary gentleman.’ Real testimonials will flow in freely enough after a time; and no wonder, in an age when respectable people rush forward to testify that they have shaken hands with Homer under a dining-room table. Still, you must not rely too much upon these certificates, and as your business cannot be conducted without the aid of literary talent, you will do well to engage such talent from the moment of starting. Your advertisements will have to be altered so as to hit the prevailing feeling of the hour; and the following may be regarded as a model in this respect:—

‘WET WEATHER.

‘The last spring and summer were almost unexampled for the fall of rain, which has caused the rate of mortality to be unusually high; and it is now, unfortunately, rendered higher by the dearness of provisions. From such depressing influences diseases must arise, but, fortunately for the humbler classes, Professor Puffaway has discovered the means of averting or curing most disorders, especially such as occur from poor or depraved blood. By Puffaway’s remedies that fluid is perfectly purified from all contaminations caused by irregular

living, unwholesome diet, foul air, or insalubrious vapours. His medicine, and no other, will regulate the digestive organs, and vivify generally every corporeal, solid, and fluid.'

In specifying what diseases you profess to cure with the sawdust pill, be careful not to use any terms but what are vague and general. Cling to nervous, imaginary, and digestive disorders, but never break into the province of the surgeon, or you may expose the weakness of your nostrum. Head your advertisements—'To the Nervous and Debilitated'—'A Boon to Nervous Sufferers'—'Bile! Bile! Bile!' or 'Bile, Wind, and Indigestion'—'The Sinking may be Saved'—'Health and Happiness'—or, 'By Her Majesty's Royal Letters Patent.' Get these 'letters patent,' and the Government stamp—they cost very little—and they will give an air of authority to the sawdust and gamboge, which will be of infinite value. Whenever an epidemic or prevailing disease appears—such as the Asiatic cholera, for example—leap upon its back with your sawdust pill without the slightest hesitation. Such diseases never last for any length of time, and when they are gone you can take credit in your advertisements for having expelled them. You may sometimes find it of advantage to start an opposition against yourself, or to come to some understanding about mutual abuse with an opponent already existing. Old Dr Gravesend is now engaged in a profitable fight with young Dr Gravesend respecting the celebrated sauce of prunella; and it is marvellous that the enterprising Doo Babby has never tried this expedient in puffing the delicious prevalenta. If your sawdust pill is commercially analyzed, the account will stand thus on a single box, sold, we will say, at two shillings,—

<i>Organization.</i>					£	s.	d.
Advertisements	..	..	..	..	0	0	4
Discount to Druggist	..	..	..	..	0	0	4
Cost of working business	..	..	..	..	0	0	1
					0	0	9
<i>Cost of Pills.</i>							
Gamboge and making	..	..	..	..	0	0	1
Sawdust	..	..	..	..	0	0	0
					0	0	10
Profit	..	..	..	..	0	1	2
					0	2	0

If any daring speculator hesitates about blessing his fellow-creatures with this sawdust pill—of course, with a far more attractive name—let him get some competent chemist to analyze any of the popular

pills of the day, and he will soon gain courage. The most notorious of these pills are those which go by the general names of antibilious, aperient, and liver pills. Aloes—the prolific source of trusses and bandages—is the basis of them all; and to this is added gamboge, jalap, extract of colocynth, soap, and sometimes a volatile oil, as oil of linseed, oil of peppermint, oil of caraway, or oil of cloves. They are, therefore, almost identical in their composition with the common aperient pills, such as are dispensed at the public hospitals and sold at a cheap rate by every druggist in the kingdom.

There is one set of these antibilious pills, known as treasures of the desert, which are highly silvered for the sake of appearance, and then sold in boxes at one shilling and one penny halfpenny. They consist of scarcely anything but aloes and soap; and one pennyworth of pillcochie, as it is termed, would make about two boxes. This may be considered a highly profitable nostrum, and I congratulate the oriental proprietor upon his valuable property.

Another set of pills consists of extract of colocynth, extract of aloes, Castile soap, and a little oil of cloves; and another set, called antibilious, is made chiefly of aloes, scammony, jalap, and gamboge, with a very small quantity of camomile. Another set that is labelled restorative, consists of about equal parts of gamboge and aloes; and the most popular set of them all, warranted to cure every disease, is composed of aloes, a vegetable matter like scammony or jalap, and soap.

Another set of the professedly antibilious division of pills is made up of aloes, scammony, gamboge, jalap, calomel, soap, and syrup of buckthorn. A very popular bilious and liver pill is made of aloes and colocynth; and certain well-advertised vegetable pills, credited with the most marvellous qualities, consist of aloes and cream of tartar; or gamboge, aloes, colocynth, cream of tartar, and a vegetable matter like horehound. The pills which are reputed to keep off death until the patient reaches twice the allotted age of man, are made of nothing more remarkable than aloes and a vegetable extract like colocynth. This simple compound has yielded one or two fortunes and a parliamentary membership, and is still a much more productive property than all the cardinal virtues put together.

The basis of all these pills, and many others, appears to be a common and cheap substance which is usually called bitter aloes; and upon this is built up a mixture of soap, scammony, jalap, colocynth, and frequently gamboge. Of all these substances, the last is by far the most dangerous, in fact, it is ranked amongst the acrid or hot

poisons. In the United States (still amongst the great credulous Anglo-Saxon race), where nostrums abound, perhaps, more than in this country, it has been proved that calomel is at the bottom of nearly all the cheap aperient pills. The reason that gamboge has been selected by the quacks in England as a principal ingredient of their antibilious pills, is because of its great activity as an aperient. Nine people out of ten believe in a nostrum all the more firmly the more it prostrates them, and a strong mixture is accordingly provided.

There is another class of pills which may be alluded to—the stomachic, dinner, digestive, and tonic pills. They are composed of aloes, ginger, rhubarb, ipecacuanha, and a volatile oil, such as cloves or peppermint.

One tonic set consists merely of rhubarb and ginger; and another highly popular pill, which is supposed to be a sweetener of the human system, is made of aloes, extract of camomile, and a little oil of camomile. Another set is composed of black hellebore, liquorice, turmeric, opium, Castile soap, syrup of saffron, and oil of turpentine; and another, which, from its title, appears to have been invented by the nobility and gentry, is made of aloes, mastic, red rose leaves, and syrup of wormwood.

A third, and the most disgusting class of quack pills, is the renal and gravel pills, which consist of soap and carbonate of soda. Two of the most notorious of these owe what little activity they possess to the alkali of their two ingredients. Another pill, put forward as a cure for hemorrhoids, consists chiefly of pitch.

Certain pills have been advertised very extensively of late in the form of an appeal to nervous sufferers, from a ‘retired clergyman,’ who undertakes to send the recipe on the receipt of a single postage stamp. The prescription generally sent upon application runs thus:—

‘Alcoholic extract of *ignatia amara*, thirty grains; powdered gum Arabic, ten grains; make into forty pills.’

This recipe is usually accompanied with a sincere and earnest hope that, under Divine Providence, it may be found to produce the desired effect. It commonly happens that no one can make up the prescription but the dispenser to the ‘retired clergyman,’ and another application has to be made, accompanied with two-and-sixpence in postage stamps, to obtain a supply of the pills. These pills have been examined, and found to contain no particle of the active principle of the *ignatia amara*, but their real ingredients were eight grains of gum, eleven grains of starch, and one grain of a greenish matter wholly inert.

It is fortunate, perhaps, that the 'retired clergyman' is cautious enough to send such a preparation, for if the pills containing the real *ignatia amara* were taken with any degree of indiscretion, it is very probable that death would be the result.

The stomachs of 'nervous sufferers' and afflicted people need be strong, for train oil is often a principal ingredient in the common soap so largely used in mixing these quack nostrums. The speculator in the sawdust pills need not fear to venture, after wading through such a nauseous list as I have just given. His compound will at least have the merit of simplicity. The sawdust, which is to form the basis, can be invested with all the real and imaginary qualities of peruvian bark, and the gamboge by its activity will, as usual, prove the truth of this or any other assertion. If my sawdust pill project be not immediately seized, I shall begin to think that no enterprise is left in the country.

AN EXECUTOR.



SILAS NESTEGG, ESQUIRE, having died suddenly, appointed me his executor, in conjunction with a gentleman whom I had never before heard of. I did not refuse the trust, as it was forced upon me by friendship, although I had no recollection of ever being consulted on the subject. Silas Nestegg was always extremely uncommunicative upon matters connected with his property, and I was always very unwilling to ask him any questions.

'My deceased friend was one of those quiet, restless speculators, who are very common amongst middle-aged gentlemen of leisure commanding a certain amount of floating capital. He was always running about the City for the purpose of selling out of something, buying into something else, and spreading his money over the greatest possible area. He was part of the tank in a large water-works; he was a station or an engine on a Canadian railway; he was twenty yards of road-pipes in a leading gas factory; he was half of a fishing-smack, and two-thirds of a steam tug-boat; he was so many tons of French bread that went into the mouths of French soldiers, and so many pounds of Austrian lead that went into those soldiers' hearts; he was a blind alley in a Welsh coal mine; a dozen yards of electric cable

at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean ; another dozen yards of the same material about to be flung into the Red Sea ; he was two omnibuses and six pairs of horses ; he was five hundred sovereigns shovelled about on a banker's counter ; he was eighty gallons of the finest gin turned out of a London joint-stock distillery ; he was ready to carry the post-office mails ; to provide for the widow on the death of her husband ; to compensate the railway traveller for a smashed nose, or a wooden leg ; to put out a fire, or to make good the loss ; to build a theatre to annoy a chapel, or to build a chapel to fulminate against a theatre. In short, he was that machine of universal adaptability—a capitalist who dabbled a little in almost every investment.

Some of these shares and undertakings I was not surprised to find, as I heard of them, at different times, from my late friend's own mouth ; but most of them came upon me quite unexpectedly.

Those I had heard of turned out to be the safe and profitable investments, while those I had never heard of were the dead leaves of the capitalist's cash-box. The late Silas Nestegg, Esquire, was never known to admit that his judgment had led him into anything like a failure.

Some of the unavoidable detail of this sudden trust duty was attended to by my late friend's solicitors ; but much more—and that, perhaps, the most troublesome and responsible portion—fell upon me and my co-executor.

My co-executor was the mildest of all existing business men. He had no opinion of his own, and no voice to enforce it. He was small in body, weak in spirit, and feeble in mind. He was thin, fair, fifty-six, always scrupulously clean, and always dressed in old-fashioned tied shoes, that were like dancing-pumps.

He left everything to me ; he listened attentively to everything I said, and he merely repeated a few of the last words I had uttered, which he looked upon as an answer. His name was Ebenezer Nutmeg, and he was very particular in informing me that he was no relation of the deceased, in case I should think so from the similarity of surname.

The difficulties attendant upon winding up a complicated estate were increased, in the present instance, by the character of the people amongst whom we had to divide the property.

The chief legatee was a nephew of the late Silas Nestegg, Esquire (who died a bachelor), a muscular ruffian about thirty-five, who had been to sea ; who had tried a digger's life, or something of that kind, in California, without success ; who had left the country after nearly

killing a man in San Francisco over a game of dominoes; and who was found, upon being advertised for, as a private soldier in a regiment of the line, with a very bad character, a love of raw brandy, and a tendency to delirium tremens. His commanding officers candidly told us, after we had paid the regulation amount to buy him off, that they would gladly have parted with him for half the money.

Besides this hopeful ward, whose interests we were bound to attend to, under the strictest penalties of the law, we were brought into contact with a number of small legatees, of different degrees of relationship to the deceased capitalist. The smaller their claims under the will, the more importunate the claimants, the more suspicious of our legal authority over the property, and the more indignant at our alleged slowness in proceeding to realize and divide. There was one thin, middle-aged lady, whose legacy was something less than a hundred pounds, who was always waiting to see me when I came down-stairs in the morning, and who wrote me plaintive letters—not unlike begging-letters—when any business or pleasure took me out of town for a few days. She was pinched and shabby in appearance; she took snuff; she carried an umbrella and wore pattens; she always sat on the extreme edge of a chair, till she seemed in momentary danger of slipping off; and she held a glass of wine or a cup of tea mincingly in her hands, which were always encased in long, claw-like, faded, and darned black gloves. She had lived for many years without requiring parochial assistance or without being taken to jail for debt; but the prospect of this small legacy seemed, all at once, to overwhelm her with misfortune. The broker's man had just that morning been put into possession of her apartments for one quarter's rent, and could I advance her five or ten pounds, on account? I must know how extremely inconvenient it was for a maiden lady like herself to lodge in the same rooms with a broker's man; and if it had not been for a sympathetic female in the same house, who lent her half a bed, she would have been compelled to walk about the streets all night, as she had no money to procure another lodging. My refusals only brought her back again, morning after morning, to rate me loudly, at last, upon my hard-hearted conduct.

'It's all very well for you,' she said, glancing round my breakfast parlour, 'who recline in the lap of luxury, but how would you like all your things to be standing on a truck in the street?'

'Not at all,' I replied; 'but that has nothing to do with my duties as a trustee.'

'That's where my little hard-earned property will be then in a few

minutes,' she continued, not heeding my last remark, and bursting into tears. 'I left them cording up the boxes, and throwing the crockery about, as I came away.'

I was compelled to advance her five-and-twenty pounds out of my own pocket before I could get rid of her, although I had no idea whether the property, spread about as it was, would realize any of the legacies after the sales were effected and the debts were paid.

My co-executor fared even worse than I did: for the rampant nephew had found him out, and had favoured him with several unseasonable visits in a triumphant state of drink.

This hopeful legatee had already placed himself in funds, by means of a small bill transaction with a trusting friend; and as the bill had arrived at maturity without being paid, and the trusting friend began to get anxious for his capital and interest, the hopeful legatee was easily prevailed upon to make a demonstration against his tardy, self-interested trustees, especially as he was naturally inclined for such a hostile proceeding.

'Look here,' he said. 'I'm not a-going to be kept out o' my property in this way. Hand over the stuff.'

'Hand over the stuff! Exactly,' answered my timid co-executor. 'Pray, sir, let me beg of you, sir, not to make such a noise, as you see I'm only in lodgings.'

'I don't know anything about lodgings,' returned the hopeful legatee, even more noisily than before, and striding about the apartment, which was on the first floor. 'I can't live upon air, can I? D'ye want me to beg in the streets?'

'Not exactly,' replied my timid co-executor, in his way; 'you can't live upon air, can you? You don't want to beg in the streets? Pray, sir, let me implore you, sir; my landlady's very particular, and I think she's alarmed at the noise.'

'Noise be jiggered!' continued the hopeful legatee, 'she'll be alarmed at more than that, if I don't get fifty pound. There's no Court o' Chancery about me; I can take care o' myself without any law.'

'Without any law, exactly, sir; pray, sir, don't strike the table, sir, because it's not mine.'

Of course my timid co-executor was worked upon by these violent actions to advance various sums of money to the hopeful legatee, at different times, until the amount had reached something like two hundred pounds. He complained to me that this was not the worst effect of the legatee's visits, as his landlady—by whom he seemed to be

governed, although he was never back in his rent—had already begun to suspect that the noisy visitor had some mysterious claim upon him, as an illegitimate or discarded son.

In all cases of sale and payment I had to consult my co-executor, although his character rendered this ceremony a purely formal matter.

‘I think,’ I have often said, when one of the knotty points arose, which were constantly presenting themselves during the progress of our trusteeship, ‘we had better not incur any further responsibility without the advice of our solicitor?’

‘Without the advice of our solicitor? exactly,’ he always replied; ‘we had better not go any further without the advice of our solicitor.’

The advice of our solicitor was not worth much when obtained, except that it gave a legal sanction to our proceedings. On all occasions, when a question of extraordinary responsibility was involved, our solicitor flew for safety to counsel’s opinion. By these means the risk (if any) was transferred from the shoulders of the attorney, who would have been responsible, to the shoulders of the barrister, who was not responsible, and so it came back in due course to us, that is, to me, being burdened through its journey with much writing, much talking, and much expense.

Time and industry enabled us, at last, to realize every variety of eccentric security, without much loss to the estate, except a positively inconvertible share in a joint-stock government annuity, called a Tontine.

A Tontine is, I believe, a scheme by which a number of persons subscribe a certain sum each to a fund, under Treasury management, in consideration of which payment, they each receive a certain annuity up to the period of their respective deaths, when the whole of their lapsed interest is transferred to the credit of the survivors. The one who lives the longest thus becomes the recipient of all the annuities of his dead partners, and when he dies, in his turn, the yearly payment ceases. His claim, as long as he lives, may be transferred to any assignee, the only condition of payment being that he shall be produced personally at the office, except in cases of certified illness, et cetera, when satisfactory evidence of his existence must be tendered.

The late Silas Nestegg, Esquire, at the time of his death, was the holder and assignee of a share of this kind for a considerable sum, which had been transferred to him as consideration for a debt by the original owner, who was now the sole survivor—the last man—of this particular Tontine. The annuity payable upon this share became due twice a-year, in two equal amounts, and continued fruitful of labour

and trouble long after all the other duties of our trust had been discharged and almost forgotten. The faded female legatee had disappeared, having got some one to marry her on the strength of her property (the hundred pounds, less money drawn on account) and her excellent expectations: the hopeful legatee, who had never been sober since the day of his coming into his property, had killed himself by tumbling head first from the top of an omnibus: my feeble co-executor had married his landlady, which produced such a marked change in his character, that on one occasion (probably stimulated by his wife) he positively refused to sign a necessary document, for fear of getting into trouble, and hinted to our solicitor, before retiring in disgust from active co-executorship, that I had not consulted him upon important points of business in a respectful and proper manner. All these things and many others had occurred, and still I was left to collect the half-yearly payments of the Tontine annuity.

It was no easy task. The annuitant was a rather vulgar, restless man who was always alive—and kicking. The annuity had been purchased for him when young, by a thoughtful relative, and he might now have been in the quiet enjoyment of it, but for an unfortunate tendency to insolvency. If the late Silas Nestegg, Esquire, was always ready to invest in any undertaking, without much investigation, the Tontine annuitant was always ready to conduct any undertaking, without any special knowledge or experience. This affinity of character may have been the cause of bringing the two men—the dead and the living—together in the relation of creditor and debtor.

The Tontine annuitant, at the time when I wanted him, could never be found. He had no longer any interest in obtaining the payment of the annuity, and he, therefore, never presented himself to prove his existence till he was sought out and fetched. He had always forgotten all about it. When I proposed to give him a per centage upon the receipts, in order to secure his attendance, our solicitor—or rather my solicitor, as I was now compelled to move individually—consulted counsel, as usual, who told the attorney, as usual, who then told me, that the law gave me no power whatever to act in such a sensible manner. There was no course left open but to use all due diligence in finding the Tontine annuitant when he was wanted, which I was bound to do in my capacity of trustee, under penalty of all the terrors of the Court of Chancery. My plan was to watch the published insolvents' list, which saved me a good deal of useless labour. To go to any shop or house that had been in the possession of the Tontine

annuitant on the last day of payment, was only to find it empty and closed, or with another name on the door-plate or over the window-front. The explanation of this peculiar restlessness on the part of the Tontine annuitant was found in his description when he came before the commissioner. He had always been trading under the firm of Inkstand and Co., as general merchants; he had always been first of one street, then of another street, and afterwards renting furnished apartments in another street, while he followed no trade or occupation; he had always been a director of a loan-office, a manager of a gold mining company, and auditor of some provident tradesmen's association, an accountant, a photographic artist, a temperance lecturer, or speaking convert, a chorus singer, a dealer in pictures, an author, a public reader of plays, a traveller on commission, and a keeper of a servants' registry-office. He had always been acting part of the time as a house-agent at the new marine settlement of Stillwater, and during the whole of the time had given lessons in animal magnetism and the art of clairvoyance.

All this apparent industry and activity never seemed to meet with a substantial reward, and he went as regularly to Portugal Street, for the benefit of the Act, as some people do to the Bank of England, for the benefit of the dividends. He knew all the Commissioners of Insolvency, with their tempers, their prejudices, their weaknesses, and their peculiar interpretations of the law, and he was almost as much interested in the death or retirement of one of these judges as the crowd of rising old barristers who hoped to get the appointment.

So far my Tontine annuitant was always to be found; but the trouble of searching for him in the particularly stifling atmosphere of a Portugal Street law court, or the equally unsavoury atmosphere of a Portugal Street tavern, had soon too little of novelty about it to make it any longer agreeable. I had seriously begun to consider what course I could adopt to secure him in one spot, and had even written to a friend who had some interest about procuring him a government appointment, when, to my great relief, I heard that he had suddenly sailed for British Columbia to introduce a new system of fire and life insurance. I have used all due diligence as a trustee to find him out, by writing a few letters to the colony, without obtaining any reply; and I consider my labours as an executor finally closed. I never expect to see my Tontine annuitant again, and I shall certainly never blindly accept another similar trust.

WHAT IS A POUND?

A CURRENCY ALLEGORY.



It was a very dry job, indeed, and they were very dry people who were doing it. It always has been a dry job, within the memory of man, and there is every prospect that it will always continue so. It was not a discussion upon the Bank Charter; it was not a debate upon gold *versus* paper; it was not an attempt to answer the late Sir Robert Peel's enigma, 'What is a pound?'—it was emptying a dust-bin.

The two men engaged in it were ordinary dustmen. They had had no advantages of early education, for ragged-schools and like institutions were unknown when they were children, and their wits had not been sharpened by their work or their recreation. The first was monotonous; the second was beer. They were both about the same age—nearer fifty than forty—and they presented nearly the same appearance, though they were not precisely balanced in intellectual power. No two companions ever worked well together, or played well together, who were upon an exact equality in this respect. One man is born to be commanded, and another is born to command; and while the dependent individual seeks his leader, the leader, in his turn, is impelled to seek his follower.

This was the case with these two dustmen. The shortest was named Daisy—the tallest, Old Crabshells; and what Daisy declared to be right, was so considered without any appeal, Old Crabshells being only too happy to obey his companion.

Notwithstanding their ignorance, which was very hopeless, these men had a certain amount of philosophy about them connected with their trade. They had attained a thorough belief that everything is dust, and they had been suspected of allowing this belief to colour their work to such an extent, that walking-sticks, umbrellas, and even great-coats, it was thought, had been sometimes tossed into their vehicle, amongst the other rubbish, while these practical philosophers were labouring under this very interesting and curious mistake.

The task that had been engaged upon, on the present occasion, did not seem to promise much. They had been let in at a back-garden door, and let out again; they had seen nothing of a street-door, passage, or hall; they had neither been shown to refractory children, in

order to tame and frighten them, nor had they had any opportunity of recommending themselves to the master of the house by taking care of his valuable wall-paper. The master of the house was unamiable and inaccessible. When they sent in their humble request for the customary beer-money, they were coolly and temperately referred to a neighbouring drinking-fountain.

‘Crabby,’ said Daisy, addressing Old Crabshells in his usual familiar style, as they went slowly and discontentedly from the place, ‘when I works down ’ere agen, I spots that party’s dust-bin, like a shot.’

‘‘Old ’ard,’ returned old Crabshells, mysteriously.

‘How d’ye mean?’ said Daisy, inquiringly.

‘I’ve nobbled that,’ returned Old Crabshells, proudly, carefully showing a dirty yellow dump, like a brass button, which he passed to his companion.

‘What’s that?’ asked Daisy, taking the article in his hand, and examining it curiously in the entrance of a court.

‘Ah!’ said his companion, ‘what is it? I picked it out of the party’s dust-bin; that’s all I know.’

The two men turned the article over in their hands, without seeming to know exactly what it was they had gained. A little rubbing against their jacket-sleeves made it cleaner, and more like a tarnished sovereign than it was before, but it was still a mystery to them. Old Crabshells deferentially left the solution of the problem to the superior mind of Daisy; and Daisy looked as if he wished that nature had not been so lavish of mental endowments in his particular case.

‘Blessed if I don’t think it’s a pound,’ said Daisy, undecidedly.

‘A what?’ asked Old Crabshells.

‘A pound,’ returned Daisy, with more decision: ‘you leave it to me.’

Old Crabshells was only too happy to be led, even when so large a sum of money as a sovereign depended upon his vote of confidence: and Daisy began at once to merit the distinction which he had sought for and had gained. The cart was got rid of at the contractor’s yard a little earlier in the afternoon than usual, and they proceeded, early on a long summer’s evening, to gather the information of which they were in need. Their inquiries were not made amongst persons of their own class, as Daisy prided himself upon being too keen for that, and they went boldly into a large fancy stationer’s shop in one of the leading thoroughfares.

Daisy had a peculiar method of gaining knowledge without expos-

ing his ignorance, which might have been profitably imitated by much more important men. He was quite unable to 'tell a clock,' but yet no one knew this when he asked the time.

'Who'd 'a thought it 'ud bin all that 'ere?' he was in the habit of saying, as he pointed to the taproom timepiece, when other persons were present; and, without having the slightest notion as to what he was pointing at, he never failed to obtain the reply he wanted.

This plan he had so often found successful, that he decided to try it on the fancy stationer's shopman.

'Who'd 'a thought it 'ud bin all that 'ere?' he said, as he laid the unknown coin on the counter.

'Eh?' inquired the shopman, looking at both his strange visitors with curiosity and suspicion.

'All that 'ere,' said Daisy.

'What, a pound?' said the shopman, taking up the coin, to examine it, and beginning to look for a customer when he found that it was a genuine sovereign.

'That's about the size of it,' returned Daisy, now learning, for the first time, what the small property really was. Knowledge is power, but the knowledge that you possess a pound is a greater power still. They knew that a certain amount of good fortune had befallen them, but they had not the faintest idea what a change in their position this coin had already worked. Without it, they were nothing but two dirty miserable dustmen; while, with it, they were able to command the attention of nearly all the world.

Everybody (in business) was sending in tenders for this pound. Every blank wall in London, Dublin, and Glasgow was covered with glaring placards appealing to this pound. Why had it been buried in the rubbish of a dust-bin so long, and hidden from so many devoted admirers and friends? Had it bruised its oats yet? was a constant and not altogether disinterested cry. Did it double up its perambulator? and, if not, why not? Did it wish to get rid of gray hair, or preserve its complexion from the ravages of a burning sun? Did it suffer from toothache, or from nervous pains in the head? Had it tried a particularly fine full-flavoured congou—the only genuine article of its kind in the world—at three shillings and twopence the pound? Would it like to go to Scarborough and back (being allowed three days at the sea-side)? or would it secure a baby-jumper, and immediately enjoy a happy home? Had it insured its life against all accidents by rail, by flood, or by field? Had it used a particular kind of sauce, a particular kind of pickle, a particular kind of starch? and

had it been careful, in all cases, to see that the labels, if nothing else, were genuine? Had it dressed itself in the only trouser that was considered elegant? had it eaten the only dinner that was considered perfect and digestible?

Columns of newspaper type were drawn up in closely printed files to ask the pound these questions; illuminated indicators, like fiery pagodas, were also asking them in the middle of the Queen's highway; so were wooden-coated men in the gutter, and large rude letters, coarsely painted upon brick walls. Lofty iron railway stations, as well as cool river bridges, covered the pound with a broad span, seemingly with no other purpose than to shout these questions from all sides, and even from the roof. Small hollow sheds, that stood at the side of railways, seemed to roar out these questions to every pound, as it hurried past in its train, like wild beasts suddenly deprived of their prey. Flocks of hand-bills fluttered like pigeons amongst the houses; omnibuses ran from point to point; pantomimic scenery was pushed on to theatrical stages; magazine covers attended upon literature; the very pavement under our feet became eloquent in words, and all for the same purpose—to address this pound. What is a pound, indeed? What is it not?

The two dustmen, as I have said before, were only very dimly aware of the importance they had suddenly acquired as the masters of this wonderful coin, for neither Old Crabshells nor Daisy was able to read. Ignorant as they were, however, they were not wholly blind to their power, and Daisy, especially, began to grow authoritatively genteel.

'Ow fur, now, would that go in your line?' he asked of the fancy stationer's shopman.

'How much can we give you for a pound, you mean?' inquired that individual.

'Ah!' replied Daisy, 'now you've hit it.'

'Well,' returned the shopman, taking a pencil and some paper, and unconsciously assuming the ordinary tone of his calling, 'there's our elegant album at three shillings, our graceful fan at half-a-crown, our cheap and durable inkstand at the same money, and our marvellous writing-case at two shillings, containing two dozen sheets of paper, two dozen adhesive envelopes, pencil, metal pen-case, with pens and blotting-book.'

'Good,' observed Daisy, looking at Old Crabshells, as the shopman paused.

'Three and five is eight and two is ten,' continued the shopman,

‘or one-half, which you can give, if you like, to your good lady; while, for the other ten shillings, we can sell you a dressing-pouch, fitted up with every necessary for the toilet; or you can have a reliable letter-scale at two-and-six, a russia or morocco pocket-book at the same money, a scent-bottle at the same money again, a paper-knife at one-and-sixpence, and a *porte-monnaie* at a shilling;—that will make the pound.’

‘Eh?’ replied Daisy, addressing Old Crabshells, ‘what d’ye think?’

‘Well,’ returned the inferior dustman, vaguely, ‘you know me.’

‘Ad ought to, Crabby,’ was the confidential reply.

‘Ah!’ was responded again.

‘We’ll think it over, mate,’ said Daisy, this time addressing the shopman, ‘an’ work roun’ ’ere agen.’

Once out of the fancy stationer’s shop, they consulted as to what they should do with their pound; and they decided, at last, to make further inquiry respecting its purchasing capability. Their work and their experience had never brought them into communication with any coin in the realm that was higher in value than half-a-crown, and they were naturally suspicious, and fearful of being imposed upon.

‘That party may be all right,’ said Daisy, alluding to the fancy stationer’s shopman, ‘an’ he may not. Eh, Crabby?’

‘Right,’ replied the inferior dustman.

They went into a shop which was at one and the same time an heraldic office, a geological studio, and a copperplate and seal engraver’s.

‘Ow fur, now, might that go in your line?’ again asked Daisy, placing the coin much more carefully on the counter than he did in the fancy stationer’s shop.

‘In which line?’ asked the shopman, willing to humour his odd-looking customers.

‘All on ’em,’ said Daisy, ‘if there’s a whole kit.’

‘Well,’ continued the shopman, smiling, while an old gentleman in spectacles was looking at them from an inner room over a green blind; ‘there’s tracing family arms, and making a sketch of them, that’s two-and-sixpence; tracing pedigrees and family histories is extra; engraving crest-plate is five shillings; a linen-marking initial-plate is one shilling; a name-plate and a set of movable numbers, for the same purpose, are two-and-sixpence each; and you can have another steel crest-die, for stamping note-paper, or a plate with about one hundred and seventy superfine wedding or visiting cards, which will make up the pound.’

The two bewildered dustmen got out of this shop very quickly.

‘I couldn’t make it out,’ said Old Crabshells.

‘No,’ returned Daisy, ‘it even got over me.’

They pursued their investigations, and the next shop they went into was a silversmith, cutler, and ironmonger’s, where they asked the same question, in the same manner, and were treated with almost chilling neglect.

‘We can give you plenty of things for a pound,’ said a stout shopman, standing guard over a large group of plated teapots, coffee-pots, jugs, and sugar-basins, that looked like a brood of Cochin-China fowls; ‘but you don’t want to buy.’

‘Is that ’ere a pound,’ said Daisy, pointing to the coin upon the counter, ‘or ain’t it not?’

‘It is,’ replied the stout shopman, rather sulkily.

‘Wery well, then,’ returned Daisy, ‘don’t I mean the thing that’s right?’

‘I don’t know,’ was the reply; ‘I can’t waste much time about it. Is it kitchen?’

‘Kinchén?’

‘Kitchen—kitchen! articles for the kitchen!’

‘Anything yer like,’ said Daisy.

‘Look here, then,’ said the stout shopman, rapidly turning over a list of prices. ‘Can you read?’

‘Not as I’m aware on,’ replied Daisy.

‘I thought not,’ was the remark, ‘and I must do it for you. You can have a strong useful tea-kettle for three shillings, a teapot for another three, a candlestick for a shilling, three spoons for ninepence, a fryingpan for a shilling, two iron saucepans for three-and-ninepence, a coal-shovel for half-a-crown, six knives and forks for four shillings, and a pepperbox and a dustpan for a shilling more, which makes the pound.’

Having ascertained that more than forty such lists, either longer or shorter according to the articles, could be made up at a pound each, if required, the two dustmen found no difficulty in leaving the shop without making a purchase, the stout shopman being only too glad to get rid of them.

They were not satisfied yet, and in a few minutes more they were standing at the counter of a furnishing glass-shop. It was a storehouse that ought to have been opened as an exhibition. If they had paid a shilling for admission, they could scarcely have grumbled, although so many similar halls of enchantment were open throughout

London, perfectly free. Every shelf was filled with crystal bottles and goblets, or plates that looked like pictures; the roof was rich with sparkling jewelled fruit, and the gleams of sunset, which came in at the back, were reflected in a hundred glistening mirrors.

The master, who was walking up and down the shop, was an affable man, who believed in the progress of the lower orders, and the great improvement which had taken place in their taste under the beneficial influences of art exhibitions and schools of design.

‘Ah!’ he said, upon being made acquainted with their business, ‘a pound’s worth? very good—very good indeed. What shall we say, gentlemen, quantity or quality?’

‘A little o’ both,’ replied Daisy.

‘Good again,’ returned the china and glass dealer, ‘good again! I think our No. 8 blue-edged china breakfast-service of twenty-three pieces—six bowls and saucers, six plates, two bread-and-butter plates, one milk-jug, one slop-basin, and one sugar-basin—which we sell at thirteen shillings and sixpence, with a claret-jug at four shillings (which will do very well for beer, and create quite a sensation when you take it to your public-house), and a glass dessert-dish at half-a-crown, which will do for cheese, will make a very good pound’s worth according to my idea.

The two dustmen, however, were not caught, even by the display of ‘our No. 8,’ and its adjuncts. They were very difficult to please, and very suspicious. The affability of the glass-dealer filled them with even more distrust than the taciturnity of the ironmonger’s shopman; while the more articles and shops they saw, the more they seemed inclined to see.

They found their way, after this, into a large haberdasher’s shop, that was chiefly devoted to the sale of ladies’ apparel. Their usual request to know what they could have for a pound was received with considerable mirth, by at least half-a-dozen shopmen. Two young men were making faces behind a pile of rolled alpacas, while two more were pretending to be busy in arranging ribbon-boxes upon shelves. The two who had the courage to face the dustmen, seemed totally unable to use their tongues or their hands.

‘Now then!’ said Daisy, who became impatient under this staring and tittering.

‘So I think,’ followed Old Crabshells, who, on this occasion, gave a sign of his existence.

The first remark produced a burst of laughter from behind the alpacas, which was quickly followed by a hearty response from the

two young men at the ribbon-boxes; and when the second remark was heard, the two prim gentlemen behind the counter could restrain themselves no longer; and, finally, the whole six joined in one general shout.

‘What is this?’ said a tall severe man in a tall severe cravat—the shop-walker of the house—who came suddenly upon the group from another department. ‘Are gentlemen to be treated in this way when they visit our establishment? Do we take down our shutters every morning on purpose to play?’

The allusion to ‘gentlemen’ produced an undertoned repetition of the word from one of the young men.

‘I said “gentlemen,” Mr Topham,’ repeated the shop-walker, as he caught the sound and the speaker, ‘and I say it again. Every person is a gentleman who comes to this establishment with ready money.’

This assertion and reproof had the effect of restoring, to some extent, the proper attention to business, and the two dustmen were made acquainted with the cost and mystery of a lady’s dress. There was a printed muslin frock at nine-and-ninepence (warranted our best washing fast colour), sufficient lining for the same for eightpence-halfpenny, a delicate waistband for ninepence, a smart little bonnet-shape for two shillings and elevenpence, the ribbon for the same for half-a-crown, a sprig or two of artificial flowers for ninepence, a gauzy veil for eightpence-threepence, a bewitching cap at twopence-threepence, and a pair of neat little lavender gloves for one-and-sixpence. That was a pound’s worth, and a very good pound’s worth too.

‘Sir,’ said Daisy, advancing to the stiff shop-walker, ‘I respect yer, an’ yer shall ’ear from me agen.’

‘Mr Topham,’ said the stiff shop-walker, severely, addressing one of the young men, as Daisy and Old Crabshells left the place, ‘you’ve hurt the feelings of a ready-money customer, and the house shall certainly hear of it to-morrow morning.’

The wandering dustmen went from the haberdasher’s direct to a large tea-merchant’s, where they learnt that their pound was not a whit less respected as a powerful instrument of exchange. They found that they had a choice, in black tea alone, of Lapsing Souchong, Assam Pekoe Souchong, rare Ankoï Souchong, Flowery Pekoe, Howqua’s mixture, Melville mixture, Scented Caper, Padrae tea, and Oolong Souchong. The green teas, the coffees, the cocoas, the chocolates, the spices, fruits, and sugars, were almost endless in their variety;

and it seemed as if the whole world had been ransacked to find a worthy pound's worth for these two common dustmen. There was half-a-pound of strong black useful Congou for one shilling and sixpence, half-a-pound of green Twankey for one shilling and fourpence, one pound of Ceylon coffee for one shilling, one pound of old English mustard for sixpence, one pound of arrowroot for eightpence, another pound of tapioca for sevenpence, a pound of maccaroni for sixpence, one pound of Carolina rice for fivepence, one pound of Cephalonia currants for fourpence, one pound of Valencia raisins for fivepence, one pound of Eleme figs for sevenpence, one pound of imperial French plums for eightpence, one pound of Tafilat dates for a shilling, one pound of Normandy pippins for fivepence, one pound of Jordan almonds for one shilling and sixpence, one pound of citron for one shilling, one pound of cinnamon for three shillings, one pound of sago for threepence, one pound of pepper for one shilling and twopence, one pound of caraway seeds for sixpence, one pound of roll cocoa at one shilling and fourpence, and one pound of Sir H. Sloane's chocolate for the same money ;—making twenty-one pounds of fragrant produce, in exchange for a pound in money.

From the tea-merchant's these two inquiring dustmen wandered into the shop of a cheap tailor, to see if their pound would procure a suit of clothes of a gay and gentlemanly character.

'Put you into a suit for a pound?' said a smart off-hand shopman; 'I should think we could! Make you an ornament to your country.'

The two dustmen exchanged signs of approval.

'There,' continued the shopman, exhibiting a light holland morning coat at three shillings and sixpence, a pair of tweed trousers at eight-and-sixpence, a quilting waistcoat at six-and-sixpence, a fancy necktie at eighteenpence. 'There, look at that! Take her to St George's, Hanover Square, and they wouldn't know you!'

'How d'ye mean!' asked Daisy.

'Oh, you know, fast enough,' returned the shopman, jocularly; 'going to get spliced; quite right. Now, I tell you what I'll do with you——'

He broke off at this point, observing that Daisy and his companion were examining the strength of the trousers.

'Ah, you may pull 'em,' he continued; 'you may pull 'em. You don't know the Marquis of Waterford?'

'Me and my mate 'ull talk it hover,' said Daisy, leaving the shop with his companion.

‘Now, look here!’ said the shopman, vaulting over the counter, and running after them to the door; ‘I’ll tell you what I’ll do with you—I want to deal: I’ll throw in a shirt, though I don’t get a penny by you.’

Observing that this liberal offer was not accepted, he asked them, in a loud tone, ‘if eighteen shillings would break their backs?’ but they still continued on their way.

They went into a bedding upholsterer’s warehouse next, most probably because they began to feel tired; and they found that their pound was still respected, although much more limited in its power of purchase. They were waited on by a mild-eyed, small, thin, middle-aged man, with a pen behind his ear, who rubbed his hands, and did not seem astonished at the peculiar appearance of his customers.

‘There’s our reeded swing cedar toilet-glass,’ he said, ‘at five shillings, which, with five of our white beech caned-bottomed chairs at three shillings each, will make one pound’s worth. There is our folding Derby birch chair (cane back and seat) at thirteen shillings, which, with a toilet service at four-and-six, and a hanging looking-glass at half-a-crown, will make another pound’s worth. There is our three-feet-by-six portable folding iron bedstead, which comes to exactly one pound; or there is our deal toilet-table—a very useful article for general common wear—at seven shillings, our deal wash-stand with drawers at seven-and-sixpence, our deal towel-horse at three shillings, which, with the half-crown looking-glass before mentioned, will make another excellent pound’s worth. We can give you a good serviceable mattress for nine shillings, and one pair of nine-quarter blankets for eleven shillings, which will make another pound’s worth. We really ought to say eleven-and-sixpence for these last articles, but I suppose we must only charge eleven to you.’

Judging from the tone and manner with which the last two words of this sentence were given, any hearer would have supposed that ‘the house,’ through its representative, had suddenly taken a particular fancy to the two dustmen.

‘Ain’t you got nothink cheaper than them ’ere?’ asked Daisy, ‘anythink in the heasy chair line?’

‘No,’ replied the little man, very mildly, ‘we keep nothing but the best—the very best.’

As they were leaving this place in search of another shop, a sudden idea seemed to have come into the mind of Old Crabshells.

‘Daisy,’ he said, ‘ain’t we ’ad enough o’ this?’

‘Well,’ returned Daisy, cautiously, ‘I don’t know.’

'Ow about supper an' a drink?' asked Old Crabshells.

'You knows a thing or two, Cocky, don't you?' was the reply. The two dustmen looked admiringly at each other, and went into the first tavern they found upon the road.

After two quarts of beer, which came to eightpence, two basins of soup at tenpence each, a rump steak at a shilling, a couple of pork chops at ninepence each, and six small loaves which came to sixpence, they began to grow dainty.

'Crabby,' said Daisy, 'ow d'ye feel?'

'Dry,' replied Old Crabshells.

'Crabby,' said Daisy, picking his teeth with a fork, 'we'll go it.'

'Daisy,' replied Old Crabshells, leaning across the table of the box in which they were sitting, 'you know me.'

'Hi, mate!' said Daisy, calling the waiter; 'what's that stuff the gents drink when they're hout on the loose?'

The waiter was attentive, though familiar; he had got the pound in hand, and knew exactly how far it would go.

'Well,' he replied, 'there's port and sherry, but champagne is considered the correct thing.'

'Oh, 'ang the c'rect thing!' returned Daisy; 'bring us a pot o' port.'

'We don't draw it in mugs,' said the waiter, timidly, 'we sell it in bottles.'

The bottle of port was ordered and brought, and turned into the mug which had held the beer.

'Eh?' said Daisy, taking a drink, and passing the mug to his friend, with an expression of disgust and disappointment on his face.

'I don't think much on that,' replied Old Crabshells, with a similar expression of face, after following his companion's example.

'Hi, mate!' again shouted Daisy to the waiter, who came at once; 'what's that 'ere other stuff you spoke on?'

'Champagne.'

'Bring us some o' that, then; we'll 'ave some 'arf-and-arf.'

The bottle of champagne—a nine-shilling bottle—was brought, and mixed with the remainder of the port wine.

'That's more like beer,' said Daisy, when he had tasted the mixture; 'but I think it wants a little o' the right sort to gi' it another lift.'

The waiter was again called, and it being found that another half-gallon of beer at eightpence would complete the pound's-worth of

refreshment, that quantity of liquor was brought, and mixed with the tankard of wine.

The last dregs of the novel punch were drained ; the tavern lights were extinguished ; the two sleepy stupid drunken men were guided out of the tavern door, and left to themselves and the friendly support of a neighbouring lamp-post. The spell was broken. The golden key—so easily found—that had opened the gates of knowledge, variety, and plenty, had as easily melted away. The pound was gone, and its late possessors were once more nothing but two dirty miserable dust-men.

[END OF VOL. I.]

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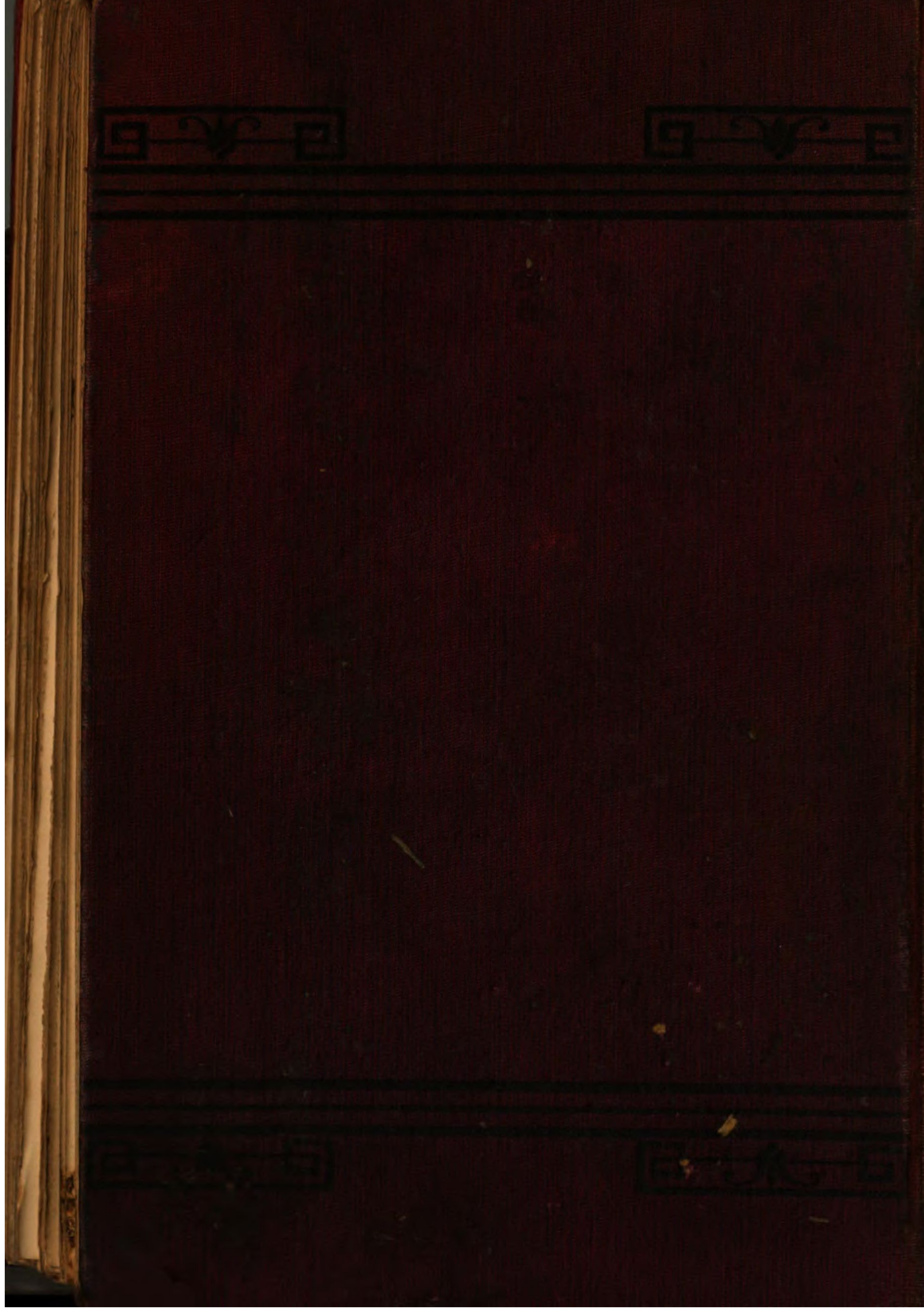
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